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HISTORY OF THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC
PARTY OF MILWAUKEE
1897-1910

BOARD OF EDITORS

CLARENCE A. BERDAHL
D. PHILIP LOCKLIN
RAYMOND P. STEARNS

BY

MARVIN WACHMAN

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PREFACE

THE CITY of Milwaukee had a Socialist administration during most of the years from 1910 to 1940, yet a detailed account of the rise of the party which put that administration into office has never been written. It is the purpose of this study to present the story of the growth of the Social-Democratic party of Milwaukee, which first entered the political arena in 1897, and captured the electorate in 1910. Roughly, those dates comprise the limits of this study.

By necessity, the press of the Social-Democratic party has been heavily relied on. However, the views of the opposition regarding the party's growth have by no means been neglected.

The word "socialist" has been capitalized only when reference is made to a definite political party. "Socialist" and "Social-Democratic" have been used interchangeably, but the Socialist Labor party has, in every case, been referred to as such. The hyphenated form "Social-Democratic" was adopted January 30, 1904 (see footnote 81, page 51), and the usage in this study varies accordingly: references to the party prior to 1904 are to the "Social Democratic" party; thereafter, to the "Social-Democratic" party.

This study was undertaken at the suggestion of Professor Fred A. Shannon of the University of Illinois, whose advice has been very helpful. The author is especially indebted to Mr. Frederic F. Heath, journalist, and member of the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors since 1910, Mr. Albert Schnabel, Treasurer of the Milwaukee County Historical Society, and Mr. Theodore Mueller, archivist of the Milwaukee County Historical Museum and Library. The librarians of the Milwaukee Public Library and the University of Wisconsin Library and the permanent officials of the Federated Trades Council were also of great assistance. The aid of Mrs. Adeline Wachman in preparing the manuscript was invaluable.

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THE BIRTH OF A PARTY

ON FRIDAY NIGHT, July 9, 1897, the foundation of Branch One of the Social Democracy of America was laid. The scene was Ethical Hall in the locally-called German Athens of America, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Eugene Victor Debs gave the main speech of the evening to a group of from seventy-five to one hundred listeners, and Victor L. Berger was one of the first to join the organization formally.¹ Thus simply began an important episode in Milwaukee's history. But it was the culmination of a complicated maze of events beginning back in the late 1840's.

The Germans who migrated to America in the dozen years preceding the Civil War were called "forty-eighters," and there is no doubt that this was a good name with which to characterize many of them. For the events of 1848, and the conditions before and after that year, drove many dissatisfied people from central Europe to America.² Wisconsin was one of the states which offered an attractive place for them to settle.

Between 1840 and 1852 pamphlets and books describing the resources and favorable climatic conditions of Wisconsin were circulated in some parts of Germany and greatly influenced intending settlers to seek that state. These guides for immigrants found especially eager readers in the Rhine region, in the Wupper Valley, and in the Duchy of Brunswick.³

Most of the Germans who came to Wisconsin stopped at Milwaukee first. Many of them stayed there, so that before 1850, Milwaukee was already considered a German city.⁴ More German than English was spoken there, and already there were German churches, schools, clubs, societies, and recreational features, all of which constituted powerful attractions. Added to this, Milwaukee was "the most important industrial center of the state, with a relatively large demand for the labor, which with farm work, was the poorer immigrant's sole means of getting a financial start." Likewise, it was the commercial metropolis, and the German farmer was "firmly tethered to his market."⁵

Much of the social and intellectual life of these Germans who settled so abundantly in Milwaukee and elsewhere in the United States was confined to their Turn societies. Like the early Gymnasia, the Turn societies developed into centers for both physical and intellectual effort. Very early they took the name of *Sozialistischer Turnerbund* of North America, but after the Civil War, these societies became more conservative and dropped the word "Socialist" from their name. Politically, these turners supported the Free Soil party, and many attached themselves to Lincoln's Republican party.

Nevertheless, there was a line of these turner-socialists who remained socialists and formed a nucleus of socialist turn societies in the 'eighties and 'nineties. One of the early Milwaukee turner-socialists who remained true to his principles was Colonel Hans Boebel. Since there was no continuous and well-organized socialist party in America until 1890, Boebel and others, who were socialists at

¹*The Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 10, 1897; *The Wisconsin Vorwaerts* (Milwaukee), July 10, 1897. (Hereafter these papers will be referred to as *Sentinel* and *Vorwaerts*.)

²H. H. Alois Lacher, *The German Element in Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, 1925), 18.

³Wilhelm Hense-Jensen and Ernest Bruncken, *Wisconsin's Deutsch-Amerikaner* (translation by Joseph Schafer, Madison, 1939), 25-26.

⁴Joseph Schafer, "The Yankee and the Teuton in Wisconsin," in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, VI, No. 2 (December, 1922), 17, 18.

⁵*Ibid.*, 18.

heart, were elected to public office as Republicans. Boebel served Milwaukee as a Republican city treasurer during 1871-1873.⁸

From the early 'seventies on, the real beginnings of Milwaukee's socialist movement are encountered. Between 1874 and 1876 a Milwaukee branch of the International Workingmen's Association, the "Marx International," met at a place called Casino Hall.⁹ Its members became active in the Social Democratic party in the 'nineties. As early as 1877 election ballots were printed with the title "Social Democratic Ticket" appearing on them. Actually, these were merely tickets appealing to the workman, and the Social Democratic party of Milwaukee did not come into existence until twenty years later.¹⁰

The story of the early newspapers of socialist tendencies plays an important part in the early history of socialism in Milwaukee. On November 15, 1875, a single-sheet newspaper, called *Der Socialist*, was first published in Milwaukee.¹¹ The editor was Joseph Brucker, a daring young Austrian, who had come to Milwaukee about five years before and had published since 1871 the *Milwaukee Freidenker* and the *Biron and Brucker's Sonntags Blatt*.¹² About 1876 an English weekly called the *Social-Democrat* was also printed, but both papers soon disappeared. In the meantime, Michael Biron, who had cooperated earlier with Brucker, returned to Milwaukee and began publishing a socialist weekly around 1880, which he called the *Arminia*.¹³

In 1886, Paul Grottkau, a noted socialist speaker, and the editor of the *Chicago Arbeiter Zeitung*, came to Milwaukee, changed the *Arminia* to the *Milwaukee Arbeiter Zeitung* and made it a tri-weekly.¹⁴ In 1893, Victor Berger became editor of the *Arbeiter Zeitung* and changed it to the daily *Wisconsin Vorwaerts*.¹⁵ There is no question that Berger made the paper seem less significant than it really was, by using "Wisconsin" instead of "Milwaukee" as a prefix to "Vorwaerts," but his taking over the paper marks the real rise in the fortunes of Milwaukee socialists, and the inauguration of a real propaganda campaign. Henceforth, scientific socialism as adapted to the American environment was the aim of the Milwaukee socialists. They were opposed to Daniel De Leon's Socialist Labor party, which to them was foreign and revolutionary. Although these Milwaukee socialists were largely German, and used the German language, they considered themselves very American.

The platform of Berger's *Vorwaerts* in the middle 'nineties emphasized immediate aims and soft-pedaled "revolutionary" ideals. Trade-unionist influence was undoubtedly responsible in part for this platform. Milwaukee trade-unionists were practical people, and if Berger was to win them over, he had to lay much more stress on immediate things than on revolutionism. Opportunistic or revisionist socialism was preached by necessity. Nevertheless, Berger wanted to keep the support of the older, more radical socialists, if their views could be tempered

somewhat by words. Consequently, he wrote as a preface to the platform contained in his first issue of the *Vorwaerts*:

In formulating our demands, we are obliged to take many things into consideration. To those who regard us as being too moderate, we reply that if you demand too much at one time you are likely to get nothing. . . . A daily paper ought not let out of its sight even for a moment the real sentiment of the masses. Nothing more ought to be demanded than is attainable at a given time and under given circumstances.¹⁶

This was a statement to which few previous socialist leaders could subscribe. It was a signpost which guided the Milwaukee socialists for at least the following twenty years. To borrow a phrase from Selig Perlman, the American stage of Milwaukee socialism had begun.¹⁷

Among the economic demands contained in the platform of the *Vorwaerts* were: state and municipal ownership of public utilities; national ownership of mines; gradual absorption of monopolies by the nation; strict factory inspection, with employers' liability to arrest; prohibition of child labor; state courts of arbitration; state recognition of trade unions; income and inheritance taxes; fixing by law of a normal working day; old age pensions; and sickness insurance, with state help, and under state control. The political demands of the *Vorwaerts* included: abolition of the United States Senate, the President's veto power, the standing army, and immigration restrictions. They also included planks favoring the right of recall of congressmen, direct presidential elections, and minority representation in Congress. Further, the *Vorwaerts* spoke for perfect freedom of conscience, opposition to prohibiting the sale of alcoholic liquors, and revision of the entire legislation "for the benefit of the exploited masses of the people."¹⁸

Aside from the early history of the 'forty-eighters, the turners, and the development of a socialist press, the story of the labor movement in Milwaukee must be considered, since that movement was intimately associated with the growth of a socialist party. In 1887 the Federated Trades Council was formed as a regular local-chartered central body of the new American Federation of Labor. From the beginning, the socialists had strength in the Trades Council, the brewery workers and cigar makers alone contributing about twenty socialist delegates.¹⁹ As early as 1893 the *Vorwaerts* was catering to its trade-unionist constituency. However, it was not until the very late 'nineties that the Socialist party gained complete control of the Federated Trades Council. In 1901, when the *Social Democratic Herald* made its bow in Milwaukee, the Trades Council adopted the paper as its official organ. Earlier than this the *Vorwaerts* had served that purpose, but it had appealed only to those members who read German.

From the above discussion it may seem that the socialist element in Milwaukee was exclusively German. Even if this were true, it would not be surprising, since the population of Milwaukee County in 1895 contained over twenty-four per cent German-born persons,²⁰ and the total of Germans in the city of Milwaukee, native-born or of German parentage, in 1900 was over 150,000—out of a total population of 285,315.²¹ In looking at these figures, it must be remembered that although most of the early Milwaukee socialists were Germans, many of the

⁸Victor L. Berger, "Early Socialists in Milwaukee," in *History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victories* (Alfred W. Mance, ed., Milwaukee, 1911), 53-54; *Sentinel*, November 1, 1896.

⁹Berger, *loc. cit.*, 54. This Milwaukee branch had its beginning in 1871.

¹⁰The *Milwaukee Leader*, April 6, 1920. Hereafter referred to as *Leader*. Reproduction of an old-time ballot.

¹¹May, 1876, has heretofore been the date generally ascribed to the appearance of this paper.

¹²*Biron and Brucker's Sonntags Blatt* (Milwaukee), April 5, 1874. These papers prove Brucker appeared in Milwaukee in 1871, rather than 1876, as stated in general Milwaukee histories. Note the name appended to this *Sonntags Blatt*; there was another paper by the same name.

¹³Berger, *loc. cit.*, 55.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 56; Frederic Heath, *Social Democracy Red Book* (Terre Haute, Indiana, 1900), 39.

¹⁵The *Wisconsin Vorwaerts*, January 3, 1893.

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¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Selig Perlman, *History of Socialism in Milwaukee* (B.A. thesis, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1910), 1.

¹⁸*Vorwaerts*, January 5, 1893.

¹⁹Berger, "Early Socialists in Milwaukee," in *History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victories*, 59.

²⁰*Census Enumeration of State of Wisconsin, 1895* (Madison, 1895), 111, 113, 116.

²¹U. S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Twelfth Census, I; Population, Part I*, pp. 884-894.

Germans were not socialists. Furthermore, there was a considerable Yankee element in the early socialist organizations. It emanated from an intellectual organization which called itself the Fabian Society. Frederic Heath, who was one of the prominent members of that group, said years later, "We took that name because it sounded good."²⁰

At any rate, Victor L. Berger soon gathered the Yankee element into his *Sozialistischer Verein*, and laid the foundation for a larger and mightier political party. Berger had come to America in 1879, and had been engaged in the Milwaukee Public School system as a teacher of German in 1882.²¹ He soon became a follower of Henry George and the single-taxers, but dropped this for socialism before he became editor of the *Vorwaerts*. As a teacher in the public schools, he was charged with having declared before pupils on two occasions that "the Bible was a humbug," and with having inflicted corporal punishment in the classroom, in violation of rules.²² He was suspended from the school system, but on appeal was reinstated.²³

At this time Victor, as his friends called him, was the *erste Sprecher* of the South Side Turnverein, then a powerful organization. He became president of this society, known under his leadership as the "Red Turn Society," and in the late 'eighties he was also president of the Turnbezirk, the general body of the entire Wisconsin district of turners.²⁴ A little later his *Sozialistischer Verein* became a power in Wisconsin politics, and the course of Social Democracy, as it came to be known, was inextricably woven into the events of his later life.

William George Bruce, a prominent Milwaukee author and civic and religious leader, but by no means a socialist, decried the ruthless methods which Berger stated that he had to use to make an impression on the public mind; but Bruce said:

There was something about Victor L. Berger that singled him out from all other politicians of his time. He was affable, courteous, and congenial in manner, and never failed to meet his political enemies as cordially as he met his friends. He would call for a friendly visit upon the very men, financiers, and industrial captains, whom he attacked vigorously in print and speech. Somehow his frankness, sincerity and genial approach assured him a pleasant rather than unpleasant reception.²⁵

One of the haunts of the "capitalists" was the Milwaukee Athletic Club, but Victor Berger's appearance was common there.

The story of Berger's first introduction of a non-German socialist to his organization is an interesting one. Frederic Heath was the "guinea pig" and tells the story thus:

Berger took me down to the old *Freie Gemeinde Hall* in the basement of where the Journal Building now stands, on Fourth and State. His *Sozialistischer Verein* was meeting, and talking exclusively in German. After a while Berger introduced me as the first Yankee socialist in Milwaukee, and from then on the meeting was carried on in English. It seems that these people were very much interested in getting American-born men of non-German extraction into their organization, and to adopt the English language in their meetings and in their publications.²⁶

²⁰Conversation with author on June 17, 1942. Quotation verified by Mr. Heath. Later the organization was called the Ethical Society.

²¹*The Milwaukee Journal*, December 7, 1897. Hereafter referred to as *Journal*.

²²William George Bruce, *I Was Born in America* (Milwaukee, 1937), 219. Mr. Bruce was a member of the school board at that time, and in an interview with the author on November 21, 1941, he related the contents of a discussion with the recalcitrant Berger. This incident is not recorded in the *Proceedings of the School Board*.

²³*Leader*, August 7, 1930.

²⁴Berger, *loc. cit.*, 54. See footnote.

²⁵Bruce, *op. cit.*, 228.

²⁶As told to author, June 17, 1942. Written version verified by Mr. Heath, who dated this story as during the street car strike "in the middle 'nineties." This strike, according to the newspaper reports, occurred early in 1896.

The German socialists in America at that time had a great desire, without which they saw no possible progress, to have socialism become "native to the soil." Young Mr. Heath was a real descendant of Pilgrim New England, and was, to the German Socialists of Milwaukee, a peerless recruit. Later, Heath wrote of himself:

Like the typical convert, the intensity of my Socialism was unbounded. I was terribly academic. . . . Ordinary words were too tame; phrases were my "long suit," and I remember now, when we were about to form (an) English-speaking branch at last, it was my suggestion that the fact of having read Marx's *Capital* should be the badge of eligibility to membership! Luckily this proposition was not agreed to, and so the club grew in membership and influence—and Marx escaped again being made a fetish. Meantime Berger and I had become brother confessors. He had a fund of general information and a far-seeing judgment that I made big draughts upon. It helped to reduce the intensity of my fanaticism, and gave me a much clearer outlook.²⁷

One other group formed a vital part of the organizing socialists. That was the association known as the People's party. The movement of various dissatisfied reformers—nationalists, single-taxers, socialists, agitators for direct legislation, etc.—found common expression for their grievances under the banner of the Populist party in Wisconsin, as well as in other states.²⁸

On the evening of October 9, 1893, representatives of the *Sozialistischer Verein*, the Socialist Labor party, the People's party, and the Federated Trades Council of Milwaukee, met as a group to organize for the approaching municipal campaign.²⁹ They were at odds over many points, but a coalition committee of fifteen finally decided on a Cooperative Ticket, and adopted a platform permeated with socialist philosophy.³⁰ Victor Berger, as editor of the *Vorwaerts*, maintained that it was the duty of "all faithful Socialists" to support this Cooperative Ticket, not particularly with the idea of being successful at the polls, but in order to stimulate the class movement among laborers.³¹ Throughout the winter of 1893-1894 there were articles and editorials in the *Vorwaerts* concerning the Cooperative Ticket, and its meaning to socialism and the laboring class. Berger had very good reasons for preaching support of the Cooperative Ticket. The platform and demands of that ticket were decidedly socialistic, and therefore lessened the incentive of the union members to join the radical Socialist Labor party.³² Likewise, the People's party was very popular among trade-unionists at that time, and an alliance with that party was necessary to keep in close touch with the labor movement.

Nevertheless, the entente between the regular Populists and the socialists was too good to last, and when the state Populist convention met in Milwaukee in July, 1894, the rift between them became apparent. Robert Schilling, Chairman of the Populist Party State Central Committee, led the fight against the admission of socialist delegates who had not been chosen in accordance with the regulations laid down by the executive committee of the Populist party. Schilling was very anxious to know whether Berger would support the Populists if his socialist planks were not included in the platform. Berger stated that the socialists would support the Populists only if the platform of the American Federation of Labor were accepted. Schilling refused Berger's terms, and at first the convention supported Schilling's fight against admission of the "irregular" socialists. Twenty-

²⁷Frederic Heath, "How I Became a Socialist," in *The Comrade*, II, No. 7 (April, 1903), 155.

²⁸J. Martin Klotzke, "The 'United Front' Populists," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, XX, No. 4 (1908, 1937), 375.

²⁹*Vorwaerts*, October 10, 1893.

³⁰*Ibid.*, October 17, 1893.

³¹*Ibid.*, November 23, 1893.

³²*Ibid.*, October 18, 1893.

four socialists and members of the trade-unions, led by Berger, withdrew; but the convention soon reconsidered its motion, and the "irregulars" took their seats again.³⁴

The influence of the socialists was clearly seen in the platform as finally drawn up by the Populists. The convention endorsed the Omaha platform of 1892 and all of the 1893 proposals of the A. F. of L. political program.³⁵ After drawing up the platform, the convention chose a ticket for the coming state election. Of the 25,804 votes which the Populists won in the state, over 9,000 came from Milwaukee County.³⁶

Right after the election which took place on November 6, Berger, in a *Vorwaerts* editorial, indicated that he was willing to continue his connection with the Populist party only on condition that it move in the direction of socialism.³⁷ The alliance between the socialists and Populists continued until 1896. In that year Berger was a delegate to the St. Louis convention, and led a Debs-for-President movement in opposition to the Bryan free-silverites. In writing of the convention, Berger greatly over-emphasized the part played by the socialists; according to his account the contest was between socialists and free-silverites.³⁸

True, there were socialists at the convention, and Eugene Debs was suggested as a possible candidate for the presidential nomination. However, Debs's name was never formally brought before the gathering, and the socialists were a distinctly minor element there. John D. Hicks scarcely mentions them in his treatment of the 1896 Populist convention. His comprehensive account, taken from a thorough study of the sources, describes a struggle, which was primarily between fusionist and middle-of-the-road factions within the Populist party. The fusionists wanted the Populists to nominate the Democratic slate of William Jennings Bryan and Arthur M. Sewall, while the middle-of-the-road element desired to stay clear of anything hinting at fusion with the Democratic party.³⁹

The socialists at the convention were unquestionably middle-of-the-roads, and the tactics of the fusionists irked them a great deal. At a crucial stage of the convention, the lights of the hall were turned off against a middle-of-the-road demonstration. Finally, the fusionists succeeded in nominating Bryan, but their main opposition had been the middle-of-the-road element, and not the socialists, who merely formed a minor part of the latter group.⁴⁰

At any rate, the convention marked the end of the socialist-Populist alliance. The socialists soon formally announced their breaking of all connection with the Populists, who "came out for silver and were ready to fuse with anybody for the sake of getting office." The socialists also announced that they had never believed in the free silver fallacy.⁴¹

From this time on the breach between these two groups became wider and wider, until, by 1898, they were openly hostile to one another.⁴² By November, 1896, Berger was already telling the workers that they should vote Populist only until a national workers' party was formed. "Sooner or later," said Berger, "we must have a national workers' party which, by peaceful means or by force of weapons, must bring about the emancipation of the working class."⁴³ References like this to using force were employed sparingly by Berger, but they were brought to bear against him by his political opponents in every campaign.

On January 2, 1897, Eugene V. Debs announced in a letter to the American Railway Union and to workers in general, that he was no longer a member of the People's party, but had been converted to socialism. He justified his past Populist connections by saying that the "free silver issue gave us . . . a rallying cry, [and] afforded common ground upon which the common people could unite against trusts, syndicates, corporations, and monopolies. . . ." Furthermore, he said: "I confess to no hope for the toiling masses of my countrymen except by the pathway mapped out by Socialists, the advocates of the Cooperative Commonwealth."⁴⁴

Victor Berger was unquestionably one of those instrumental in converting Debs to socialism. His visit with Debs in 1895, when the latter was in the Woodstock jail for contempt of court during the Pullman Strike, has become a legend around Milwaukee Socialist quarters. The contention is that Berger went to Woodstock jail with a copy of *Das Kapital* under his arm. This has been denied by many, who would like to have it believed that neither Berger nor Debs had any knowledge of Marx; but Debs confirmed it long ago in an article called, "How I Became a Socialist." He wrote:

It was at this time, when the first glimmerings of socialism were beginning to penetrate, that Victor L. Berger—and I have loved him ever since—came to Woodstock, as if a providential instrument and delivered the first impassioned message of socialism I had ever heard—the very first to set the wires humming in my system. As a souvenir of that visit there is in my library a volume of *Capital*, by Karl Marx, inscribed with the compliments of Victor L. Berger, which I cherish as a token of priceless value.⁴⁵

Whether or not Debs was impregnated with Marx is another matter. As a matter of fact, he implied earlier in the above article that Karl Kautsky and other socialists impressed him more than Marx, and his later actions clearly indicate that he was not a Marxist.

The conversion of Debs practically committed the American Railway Union to socialism. However, Debs was not in sympathy with the established national socialist party, the Socialist Labor party; he was contemplating the establishment of a new Democratic Socialist party with the aid of some independent socialists. A few days after Debs's announcement of his conversion, Berger, then in Passavant Hospital in Milwaukee, under a surgeon's care, sent a letter, written with Frederic Heath's help, to Debs. That letter eventuated a few months later in a new party.⁴⁶

The independent socialists referred to were stronger and more active in Milwaukee than anywhere else,⁴⁷ and, as noted above, were organized into a *Sozialistischer*, later *Sozial Demokratischer, Verein*, and had the added strength of the *Waukesin Vorwaerts*, a daily socialist newspaper in the German language, edited by Berger. The Milwaukee independents had maintained their organization for years against the onslaughts of the Socialist Labor party, and confidently awaited the time when a national American party having aims similar to theirs would make its appearance. The *Verein* was made up partly of old S. L. P. members. Most of them were leaders in their respective trade-unions, and, as related in preceding paragraphs, the organization had formed a wing of the local People's party, not as Populists, but as recognized Socialists. As a matter of fact, their Populist connections seem to have added some valuable converts to the socialist

³⁴*Vorwaerts*, July 5, 1894; *Sentinel*, July 5, 1894.

³⁵Klotzsch, loc. cit., 383.

³⁶*Vorwaerts*, November 10, 1894.

³⁷John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt* (Minneapolis, 1911), 359-361.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 361-362; *Vorwaerts*, July 22, 1896.

³⁹*Sentinel*, November 1, 1896.

⁴⁰*The Social Democratic Herald* (Chicago), October 22, 1898.

⁴¹*Vorwaerts*, November 10, 1896.

⁴²*Ibid.*, January 2, 1897; *Vorwaerts*, January 3, 1897.

⁴³Eugene V. Debs, "How I Became a Socialist," in *The Comrade*, I, No. 7 (April, 1902), 48-49.

⁴⁴Berger, "Early Socialists in Milwaukee," in *History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victories*,

(1) conversation of author with Mr. Heath, June 15, 1942.

⁴⁵Heath, *Social Democracy Red Book*, 55.

cause.⁴¹ These men of Milwaukee were definitely in favor of the establishment of a third party on the American political scene, in spite of the preaching of Samuel Gompers against such a party.⁴² Socialist parties were an established fact in European countries, and Milwaukee's socialists could see no reason why such a party could not be successful in America.

About 1896, a Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth was formed, and Eugene Debs was made its national organizer.⁴³ This organization had a rather utopian scheme of planting colonies in some western state with a view to the eventual political capture of the state. The connection of Debs with the Brotherhood was a factor which influenced the type of new party to be set up.

As early as June 8, 1897, a story appeared in the *Vorwaerts* with the news that Utah had been chosen as the colonization state by the embryonic organization.⁴⁴ On June 15, an article appeared in the English newspapers, clearly announcing that the American Railway Union was dead, and that it was combining with the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth to form a new organization of larger scope.⁴⁵ Along with the above announcement, the papers carried a dramatic story relating how Debs planned to take 100,000 unemployed from the streets of Chicago and establish a cooperative commonwealth in Washington or some other western state.⁴⁶ The obvious intent of that story and those appearing in the press on following days was to ridicule the proposed organization by playing up only its most far-fetched planks. As the new party definitely took shape, the publicity given it by the capitalist press was less and less.

Little interest was shown in Milwaukee among members of the A. R. U. and the Milwaukee branch of the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth.⁴⁷ In fact there is no evidence that any Milwaukeeans attended the formal meetings of the combined convention of the two organizations which began on June 18, 1897. However, Victor Berger and Frederic Heath, the representatives of the Milwaukee socialists, were in Chicago evenings helping to draw up the platform and lay the foundations for the new political party. Seymour Stedman and the Debs brothers were others working behind the scenes. Berger and Heath took a four o'clock train out of Milwaukee every afternoon, while the convention was in progress, and returned to Milwaukee on an early morning train to attend to their jobs as editor of the *Vorwaerts* and columnist for the *Sentinel*—a trip of some one hundred and seventy miles each day. Berger and Heath, along with Theodore and Eugene Debs, Seymour Stedman, *et al.*, were "the powers behind the throne" who formulated the points on which the convention voted during the daytime.⁴⁸ Actually, Berger had been commuting to Chicago before the convention met, to lay plans with Debs for the new party.⁴⁹

Finally, on June 18, 1897, the *Sentinel* carried an article saying that Debs's new party would be known as the Social Democracy of America, and that its object would be to conquer capitalism. That article again played up the colonization plank in the party platform.⁵⁰ Berger's *Vorwaerts* on the same day said, "World history is being made in Chicago," and added that Debs's colonization scheme was virtually dismantled "under critical and scientific thinking."⁵¹ And on the next day the *Vorwaerts* invited all working organizations to join the new party.

In spite of the work of Berger and Heath, the platform of the Social Democracy of America contained much long-winded phraseology concerning the colonization scheme. One of the states of the union was to be selected for the purpose of establishing a cooperative commonwealth. Production, distribution, and transportation were all to be in the collective hands of the people, and gradually the sphere of operation was to be extended until the "National Cooperative Commonwealth" was established.

On the other hand, the main planks of the platform occupied much less written space; they were contained in eight concise "demands for immediate changes of present conditions." These demands included:

1. Public ownership of industries controlled by monopolies, trusts, or industrial combines.
2. State and municipal ownership of public utilities.
3. Public ownership of all mines, oil, and gas wells.
4. Reduction of hours of labor according to the progress of production methods.
5. Public works for unemployed and the use of the public credit for that purpose.
6. Patents and discoveries to be at the disposal of everyone—the inventors and discoverers to be remunerated by the state.
7. The establishment of postal savings banks.
8. Initiative, referendum, and proportional representation.⁵²

This is no evidence that Berger or other Milwaukeeans ever believed in the colonization plan as a vehicle for the attainment of a Social Democracy in America. In fact, Berger continually soft-pedaled that scheme. He seemed to be appealing Debs, and yet he saw that the movement as a whole offered great possibilities, and that Debs was absolutely necessary as its leader. Berger did not particularly criticize the colonization scheme at this time because the followers of that visionary project were necessary adjuncts of the new party, if it were to have a numerical membership which would appear at all significant in the eyes of the general public. A year later, when that was no longer necessary, Berger fiercely blasted all colonization schemes as utopian concepts.⁵³

After the Chicago convention, which inaugurated the new third party in America, Debs's old *Railway Times* was removed to the headquarters of the new party and rechristened the *Social Democrat*. Its first issue appeared July 1.⁵⁴ But before this event, important things were to happen in Milwaukee.

Immediately after the organization of the new party, plans were made to conduct a vigorous campaign all over the country to establish branches of the Social Democracy, and to win over the dissatisfied elements of the Socialist Labor party. On July 7, Mr. Debs made his first speech for the new party at the West Side Turner Hall in Milwaukee, before a very large and tumultuous audience. The *Sentinel* sarcastically referred to Debs as the president of the newly organized Social Democracy, "which is to revolutionize the social and economic order of things in the U. S."⁵⁵ It was estimated that there were two hundred women in the audience, many of them in town for the National Education Association Convention. Significantly, William Beimdick, organizer of the Federated Trades Council, introduced Debs.

Some of the audience were disappointed because Debs barely mentioned his colonization scheme, and presented the Social Democracy as an organization to gain for the workingmen their rights, not by violence, "but by means of the United ballot of united labor." It was not strange, considering the number of women in the audience, that Debs also spoke for the rights of women.⁵⁶

⁴¹Heath, *Social Democracy Red Book*, 56.

⁴²*Journal*, May 30, 1896.

⁴³Heath, *Social Democracy Red Book*, 55.

⁴⁴*Vorwaerts*, June 8, 1897.

⁴⁵*Sentinel*, June 15, 1897.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, June 16, 1897.

⁴⁸Heath, *Social Democracy Red Book*, 56; Heath in conversation with author, June 20, 1932.

⁴⁹*Vorwaerts*, June 18, 1897.

⁵⁰*Sentinel*, June 18, 1897.

⁵¹*Vorwaerts*, June 18, 1897.

⁵²*Ibid.*, June 20, 1897.

⁵³*Ibid.*, June 14, 1898.

⁵⁴*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), July 1, 1897.

⁵⁵*Sentinel*, July 8, 1897.

⁵⁶*Vorwaerts*, July 8, 1897. The entire text of Debs's address is contained therein.

The next day, Dr. Saul A. Knopf, leader of the Socialist Labor party in Milwaukee, issued a challenge to Debs and his associates to a debate on socialism;⁶³ the challenge was not accepted, perhaps because the Social Democracy was busy organizing in Milwaukee. At any rate, it probably contributed to the welfare of both organizations that the debate was not held. The differences in the philosophies of the two parties were not reconcilable in one evening's debate. Dr. Knopf and the other followers of De León believed in revolution as against reform. They looked on the members of the Social Democracy as mere reformers, who had usurped the word "socialist" from the rightful owners of it—themselves, the students of Karl Marx.

The tactical difference between these organizations was a real one. The Social Democrats held reform and the gradual gaining of political ascendancy as their primary aims along the road to the establishment of a cooperative commonwealth, or socialist state.⁶⁴ The Socialist Labor party, on the other hand, held that reform helped to preserve the capitalist system, and that system could be done away with only through industrial and economic organization. The Socialist Labor party, in theory, abhorred political action. It maintained that industrial unionism was the Socialist Republic in the making, and that once the goal was reached, the industrial union would be the Socialist Republic in operation. In other words, the S. L. P. was, and is, pledged to further the organization of labor along industrial lines. They said that when industrial organization was complete, the political state, and the Socialist Labor party for that matter, would cease to exist, and that the Socialist Industrial Union would take its place.⁶⁵ Daniel De León, the voice of the S. L. P. everywhere, and Victor L. Berger, the prophet and guide of Milwaukee's Social Democracy, were the sages behind two opposing schools of socialism.

One item in the attacks on the Social Democracy should be cleared up. The Milwaukee S. L. P. members, in criticizing the Social Democracy, primarily tore apart Debs's original colonization scheme, but neglected other features of the party's platform. They forgot to notice that the colonization plan had become a minor plank and that it was hardly mentioned by the followers of the party in Milwaukee.⁶⁶ The appeal of the new socialist party to former S. L. P. members was not on the basis of the colonization scheme. Rather, many members and ex-members of the S. L. P. disliked the rigid membership rules, the organization methods, and the New York "ruling clique" of their party.⁶⁷ Consequently, they drifted to the Social Democracy, if not for philosophical reasons, for reasons of party management, which certainly may be valid at times. At any rate, the quick rise of the Social Democrats over the S. L. P. in Milwaukee demonstrated that the aims and methods of the former had more popular appeal.

On the evening of July 8, instead of arguing about theories as challenged by the S. L. P., Debs and Berger met and discussed the organization of a Milwaukee branch of the Social Democracy of America.⁶⁸ Then on the next night the foundation of Branch One was laid in Ethical Hall. Howard Tuttle, who was later to become the Social Democracy's candidate for governor, presided at the meeting,

after which the entire Fabian Society joined the new organization, along with Victor L. Berger and most of the gathering of seventy-five people.⁶⁹

Debs, in the main talk, emphasized the fact that the primary object of the Social Democracy was the creation of a new party in all parts of the United States, "having for its object the realization by peaceful means of a socialistic state." He further stated that the object of the projected Washington state colony was merely to experiment and show how a socialist state could and should be conducted.⁷⁰

Thus, it seems that Debs's original grandiose colonization project was temporary, and modified, by his associations with the Milwaukee socialists, until there was practically nothing left of it. It is well-known that the colonization schemes connected with the Social Democracy played a big part in the development of the party outside Milwaukee. The Anarchists, especially, found in those schemes a rallying point and joined the Social Democracy in wholesale lots.⁷¹ But in Milwaukee, colonization was not even mentioned. A mass-meeting was called for August 9 in the Bay View section of Milwaukee for the purpose of organizing a branch of the party. In the circular sent out before the meeting, no mention was made of colonization. In its stead this statement was made: "It is the aim of the Social Democracy of America to restore all the means of production and distribution to the people as a collective body."⁷² Following this statement were the eight immediate demands of the party already summarized.⁷³ The contents of this Bay View circular may be taken to represent the tenets of the Social Democracy, which its Milwaukee adherents accepted.

Debs had planned on staying in Wisconsin for a while to help organize the new party in Milwaukee, Sheboygan, and other cities, but he was forced to give up these plans. Unfortunately for the Wisconsin Socialists, he was called to the coal fields of West Virginia to give counsel in the midst of the great strike of 1897.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the membership continued to grow; an organizational and business meeting of Branch One was held on July 17, and a state organizer was soon sent out.⁷⁵ The Social Democracy of America had really taken root in Milwaukee!

Branch One of the Social Democracy of America had its roots in the distant past of Milwaukee's history. The influence of the early German liberals, who settled in the German Athens of America, can be traced faintly up to the organization which Debs and Berger consummated on July 9, 1897. Yet, the nucleus of the Social Democracy in Milwaukee was formed by distinctly later groups. Berger's *Social Demokratischer Verein* should be mentioned first among those groups. To the membership of that organization were added members of the Fabian Society, converts from the People's party, malcontents of the Socialist Labor party, and especially, representatives of the trade-unions and working class in general. Yet, the combination of these elements needed the personality of Eugene V. Debs and the organization of the Social Democracy of America to give it a name and identity.

⁶³*Sentinel*, July 9, 1897.

⁶⁴*The Voice and Pen of Victor L. Berger* (Mrs. Meta Berger and Miss Elizabeth R. Thomas, eds., Milwaukee, 1929), 684-688.

⁶⁵Daniel De León, *Reform or Revolution* (New York, 1904); De León, *Industrial Unionism* (New York, 1921). The essence of the remarks in the preceding paragraphs will be found in those works.

⁶⁶*Sentinel*, July 9, 10, 1897.

⁶⁷*The Appeal to Reason* (Girard, Kansas), July 2, 1898.

⁶⁸*Sentinel*, July 9, 1897. *The Sentinel* had no proof of this meeting, but it was probably right.

⁶⁹*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), July 15, 1897.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, July 10, 1897.

⁷¹Heath, *Social Democracy Red Book*, 50-51.

⁷²From a copy of this circular, which may be found in the Milwaukee Historical Society's Socialist party collection.

⁷³*Supra*, page 17.

⁷⁴*Sentinel*, July 13, 1897. M. J. Ratchford, president of the United Mine Workers of America, summoned Debs to the scene of the strike.

⁷⁵*Forwards*, July 18, 1897.

THE FIRST YEAR IN INDEPENDENT POLITICS

THE MILWAUKEE socialists rejoiced when the Federated Trades Council, comprising most of the unions of the city, passed a resolution on August 5, 1897, endorsing the Social Democracy by a unanimous vote.¹ It appeared that the new movement was taking the working class by storm, and consistent attempts were made through the columns of the *Social Democrat* and the *Vorwaerts* to make the workers feel that the Social Democracy was the political arm of the trade-union movement. That feeling finally engendered in the trade-unionists some two and a half years later, but only after a series of bitter skirmishes.

Meanwhile, the socialist movement received a blow when the *Vorwaerts* was forced to discontinue its daily issue, because of financial difficulty. In the last issue of the *Vorwaerts* as a daily paper, its editor thanked all those who had helped keep the paper going, and stated that he had been offered money by "those who have it" to keep the paper running as a daily, but rather than accept help from them, he had decided to make the *Vorwaerts* a weekly paper.² Later it was revealed in an annual report of the party that the editor, Victor L. Berger, had raised almost every penny of thirteen thousand dollars which was needed to keep the paper afloat.³ Fred Heath described those early struggles of the *Vorwaerts* very well:

Down in the basement at 614 [State Street] an old style power newspaper press each afternoon clanked out the edition of Victor L. Berger's Wisconsin *Vorwaerts*. It had hard sledding but there were brave souls back of it who knew no faltering. . . .

Those were hardscrabble years, with harassing debts, wearing economies and sleepless nights. One or two winters' coal had to be purchased by the bushel basket to keep the place warm, and at times, between baskets, newspaper exchanges were rolled up into ball-like form to keep the place warm. The landlord became at times a nightmare. Chairs were at a premium, and when the office was used for a party or labor meeting, long boards were placed between chairs or boxes to seat the gathering.⁴

It was certainly a misfortune that the paper, which had caused such struggling to keep it on the streets, should be forced to become a weekly. But the powers behind the Social Democracy were undaunted. They immediately began laying the plans for a daily paper in the English language, to be launched on the first day of the next year.

In a surprise move, Berger and Heath offered the editorship of the proposed paper to Daniel De Leon, the guiding spirit of the Socialist Labor party. This was truly an attempt at reconciling the opposing factions of socialism in America. In a most interesting letter to De Leon, written on October 2, 1897, Berger and Heath told of their plans to publish an English daily in Milwaukee. They planned to use the paper as an organ of propaganda for socialism and to sell it on the street for one cent. In explaining the policies of the paper to De Leon, they wrote:

. . . The paper will be issued under the auspices of the Social Democracy, but will not be partisan for that organization as against any other Socialistic organization based on scientific socialism. It will preach the Socialism of Marx, Engels, La Salle (his spirit without his schemes) and that of the Social Democrats of Germany and France while recognizing American conditions. Therefore it will be an opponent of all colony schemes, that of its own party not excepted.⁵

¹*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), August 12, 1897.

²*Vorwaerts*, August 17, 1897.

³*History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victory* (Alfred W. Mance, ed., Milwaukee, 1911), 22.

⁴*Leader*, February 26, 1920.

⁵Corrected draft of letter to Daniel De Leon from the office of Victor L. Berger, and signed by Frederic Heath and Edward James, October 22, 1897 (in Milwaukee County Historical Society). See Appendix A for text of letter.

The letter further attempted to justify De Leon's connection with the proposed paper by the following statement:

. . . There would be nothing really inconsistent in your editing such a paper as we have indicated as there would be no disposition to muzzle you nor to restrain you from justly criticizing the new Social Democratic movement whenever necessary. The differences between the two Socialistic movements in this country amount merely to questions of method, and in many cases to petty personal jealousies. Ultimately they will have to unite against the common enemy.⁶

Furthermore, the letter to De Leon contains an offer of thirty dollars a week plus transportation from New York should he accept the position. It also offered the opinion that living in Milwaukee was cheaper than in New York, and that Chicago and the Middle West were destined to be the theater of the great events of the future.

There is no evidence that De Leon ever answered the letter or made its contents public. His actions in this matter were not strange, although it seemed that the polite thing for him to do would have been to send a short note of refusal. To De Leon the Social Democracy was a thing of repugnance. It was, to him, merely a reformist movement, and would hurt socialism more than help it. One needs merely talk to a Socialist Laborite, and he gets the impression that the use of the term "socialistic" instead of "socialist" would have been enough to make De Leon turn away in disgust. Reconciliation, then, was still out of the question, though the intentions of Berger and Heath were commendable. Other attempts were made in later years by both factions to bring the two socialist parties together, but none was successful.

When the Social Democracy was organized in Chicago, it was decided that the party would in no case enter politics until after its first national convention, which would be held in the summer of 1898. However, Victor Berger and Frederic Heath, who represented Milwaukee at the organizational meeting of the new party, spoke in behalf of Milwaukee socialists, and stated that they "were sick of being forced to vote for the S. L. P. candidates," and would like to enter the race for municipal offices the following spring.⁷ Consequently, Milwaukee was given special permission to enter politics, and immediately began organizing for that purpose.

It will be remembered that soon after Branch One of the Social Democracy was formed, the Federated Trades Council unanimously endorsed the platform of the new party. On January 5, 1898, that trade-union organization elected five delegates to the first city convention of the Social Democracy. The *Vorwaerts* laid much stress on this representation,⁸ and the *Social Democrat* emphasized the action with these strong words:

The significance of this will be seen when it is remembered that the S. L. P. in its so-called warfare on organized labor has made the name of Socialism odious to a good many workmen. Nevertheless, when labor finds Socialism put forward by a strong, respectful and thoroughly determined American party, it hastens to endorse the movement.⁹

It was also mentioned in the latter paper that the Social Democracy of Milwaukee was ready to "sit on" any S. L. P. member who attempted to break up its campaign meetings.

The convention of Milwaukee's Social Democracy was held in Liederkrantz Hall on the first of February, 1898. The representatives of the Federated Trades

⁶*Ibid.* ⁷*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), February 3, 1898.

⁸*Vorwaerts*, January 6, 1898.

⁹*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), February 3, 1898.

Council were there, and the independent trade-unions of the city were well represented. A number of unions sent special delegates. Among them were the brewers, the brewery-teamsters, the wagon-makers, the coopers, the blacksmiths, the joiners, and the hod-carriers.¹⁹ The preamble of the platform drawn up by the socialists, and adopted *in toto* by all the delegates present, clearly indicated the anxiety of its authors to win the support of the trade-unionists. The preamble begins with the following statement:

We call attention to the fact that the measures we urge are in no way a cure for existing evils, nor are they necessarily socialistic institutions. They are to be viewed, rather as needed palliatives, capable of being carried out even under present conditions. Under no circumstances should the working people rest content with municipal improvements which are merely temporary in their nature and must be entirely inadequate. They should move onward to the conquest of all public powers, to an entire change of the present system for one which shall secure to the people, collectively, the means of production and distribution.²⁰

The platform made ten demands of Milwaukee government, which were set forth in no uncertain terms. These demands are important to note at this stage in the development of socialism in Milwaukee, since definite changes were made in them later, in order to appeal to a different constituency. The demands follow in a slightly briefer form than the original, but include an explanation where it seems necessary:

1. No more franchises for public utilities should be sold, leased or given away. The city should take charge as soon as possible of all public utilities now in private hands. In all public works the contract system for labor should be abolished, and if that is impossible only organized labor should be employed, and that at an eight-hour day.
2. The Common Council should take the steps necessary to make big corporations pay their rightful share of municipal taxes. This point included equalization of water rates. Ordinary consumers were paying fifteen cents per hundred cubic feet of water, while big corporations—using over 100,000 gallons a year—paid three and one-half to four cents per hundred cubic feet.
3. Work should be found for the unemployed. Since 1,700 unemployed families in the county received county aid in 1897, the socialists believed the men in those families could be put to work by improving the streets of Milwaukee, and by inaugurating a public coal and wood yards, and a public ice house. All the coal, wood, and ice at these institutions would be sold at cost.
4. The city should employ attorneys to conduct "just" cases for the poor. The police court should be reorganized so the poor man is not at a disadvantage.
5. Free medical service should be extended. The suggestion was made that two salaried physicians be appointed in each ward. Arrangements were to be made with druggists to supply drugs to the city at cost. A public crematory was also recommended.
6. At least three more public baths should be erected, as well as a number of street closets "such as are found in modern European cities."
7. Slum sections should be condemned, and playgrounds, parks, and amusement centers should take their place.
8. Free school books should be supplied. Principals of schools should be required to use half their time in instruction. The large hall in each school building should be available to all citizens for any meeting whatever, if they pay the cost of lighting.
9. At least one symphony concert a month should be given during the winter, and the fee charged should be a moderate one.
10. A compulsory half-holiday should be established on all election days.²¹

Certainly those demands demonstrate that Milwaukee socialism, by 1898, had progressed a long way from the strict doctrinaire views of the earlier Milwaukee socialists. The earlier socialists would never have bothered themselves with such minute reforms as those in which the Social Democracy were interested.

¹⁹*Journal*, February 2, 1898.

²⁰From a copy of the platform in the files of the Milwaukee County Historical Society.

²¹*Ibid.*

The Social Democracy nominated four men as their candidates for the municipal election of April 5, 1898. Those men were pledged to live up to their party's platform, and signed resignations to be used by the party if they failed to do so. For mayor the Socialists named Robert Meister, a machinist, who had formerly been a candidate for mayor on a labor ticket, at Hamilton, Ohio, and had backed only a hundred votes of election. Although the opposition press included Meister as a candidate for mayor, he doubtless held the respect of the workman.²² Howard Tuttle, a scene painter of no little renown, was their nominee for treasurer. Thomas Myers, an expert accountant, was the Socialist candidate for comptroller, and Richard Elsner, an ex-brewery employee, and later an attorney, was their choice for city attorney. All four men were intimately connected with Milwaukee's labor movement, and only Elsner was born abroad.²³

The Milwaukee Social Democrats planned an extensive campaign, but some of their plans failed to materialize. Their first problem was to find a socialist who spoke German in a persuasive manner. Since the German vote was very important, the Socialists raised enough money to import Paul Grottkau, the former Milwaukeean, who had moved to San Francisco; Grottkau was a tested German speaker, and an intense socialist. The first misfortune occurred when Grottkau's train was late arriving in town, after a huge reception at the station had been organized. Then the Social Democrats promised a number of other speakers to the populace, including most of the national leaders of the Social Democracy; they were able to produce only five of them.²⁴ Eugene Debs had originally promised to come on March 22, but after the largest hall in the city had been rented, and posters had been distributed, he was unable to fulfill the engagement. A week later he was again scheduled to appear, but was forced to remain with his wife, who was very ill.²⁵

James Cox, a Chicago attorney, Charles Soelke, Sylvester Keliher, national secretary of the Social Democracy, and Grottkau kept the early phases of the campaign going, and Debs and Seymour Stedman aided during the last few days. The space that Debs commanded in all the local newspapers on his arrival the Friday before election was enough to make his visit worth-while. In the few days he was in Milwaukee he made scores of speeches. His presence was so formidable that the Populists, who had fused with the Democrats for the ensuing election, tried every method they could think of to keep Mr. Debs from speaking for the Social Democrats.²⁶ The wisdom of Berger and company in hitching themselves to Debs's bandwagon was unquestionable.

According to the press reports, the Social Democrats polled well over 2,400 votes in the mayoralty race, and close to that number in the race for each of the three other offices for which they had chosen candidates. Rose, the Democratic candidate, was elected with the help of the fusionist Populists; he polled over 17,000 votes. Gender, the Republican candidate, polled about 18,000 votes to be Debs's closest competitor.²⁷

²²*Sentinel*, February 5, 1898.

²³*Journal*, March 5, 1898.

²⁴*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), April 14, 1898.

²⁵*Journal*, March 29, 1898. ²⁶*Sentinel*, April 3, 1898.

²⁷*Ibid.*, April 7, 1898; *Journal*, April 6, 7, and 8, 1898.

Until the end of 1911, the city clerk's office conducted Milwaukee's elections and tabulated the official results. From that time on, an election commission took over that work. The official election results compiled by the city clerk's office have probably been destroyed. There is no record of them in the files of the city clerk's office, in the vaults of the election commission, or in any other Milwaukee repository. The only records saved were the old polling lists, which are now in the hands of the election commission. However, Mr. Emil Aller, who served the city clerk's office as an election official and is still (August, 1942) working in that office, maintains that the press reports of the elections were valid as to statistics.

In spite of the exhortations of the *Social Democrat* that, "The Social Democrats of Milwaukee Deal the Cohorts of Capitalism a Staggering Blow in the Municipal Election,"¹⁹ the obvious fact is that the socialist vote was comparatively small. However, it must be remembered that this was the debut of the socialists as an independent party in politics. The German wards gave the largest socialist vote: the ninth, 247; the tenth, 215; the nineteenth, 282; the twentieth, 284; and the twenty-first, 216. The socialist vote in the English-speaking wards was insignificant.²⁰ If the socialists had had an English as well as a German newspaper, their vote undoubtedly would have been much greater. Likewise, if all the speaking engagements which the Social Democrats had promised the public had been kept, more votes would have been forthcoming. This was especially true in the Bay View district where almost every resident was a worker at the Illinois Steel Company. In that district the people had been disappointed so many times that only eighty-six votes were won there by the socialists.²¹

Another complaint that the Social Democrats made was that the leaders of the Federated Trades Council and the independent trades unions had conducted a secret, but effective, agitation against the Social Democracy, in favor of the fusionist candidates,²² thereby cutting down the support of union members considerably. Actually, the original Populist platform contained several planks which were identical with those in the Social Democratic platform, including municipal ownership of public utilities, abolition of the labor contract system on municipal projects, equalization of public service rates, and free textbooks.²³ If the Populists had remained an independent party, there would have been good reason for liberal-minded unionists to vote for them in place of the Socialists. However, by fusing with the Democrats, the Populists gave up their most radical principles for the sake of being on the winning side.²⁴

The campaign tactics of both the Social Democrats and the Populists were devoid of ethics. The Socialists spread posters over the town saying that the Populists had sold themselves to the Democrats for political jobs. Reverberation of the campaign were heard even after the election. Robert Schilling, the leader of the Populists, reproduced Socialist posters and editorials in his *National Advance*, in order to show the public how disgraceful the Socialist campaign had been.²⁵ Since the Socialists could throw like charges at the Populists for accusing them of being "hirelings" of the Republicans,²⁶ nothing was proved by either side except that a real political battle had taken place. It seems plausible, also, that the Social Democrats invoked a great deal of fear in the minds of their opponents; otherwise, the latter would not have given so much space in their papers to a party which polled less than 2,500 votes. Already then, in the spring of 1898, the revisionist Socialists of Milwaukee were capable of commanding attention, if not votes.

It was not very long after the reverberations of the spring elections faded out that the main vote-getter of the Social Democrats passed away. On June 3, 1898, Paul Grottkau, the link in Milwaukee between an old and a new type of socialism, died. His command of German was unexcelled, but it was regrettable that he did not master the English language.²⁷ With the passing of Grottkau, the Milwaukee Socialists were to lay more stress on capturing the English-speaking popu-

larly soon after Grottkau's death, the national convention of the Social Democracy of America met in Chicago. A strong undercurrent of disagreement had been growing in the Social Democracy, between the proponents of colonization and those who believed that the colonization department of the party should be disbanded, and only political action employed. Victor Berger was the leader of the latter group, while W. E. Burns, vice-president of the Social Democracy, and John P. Lloyd, a competent party organizer, led the colonization faction. Emma Goldman, the well-known anarchist, and her followers, were also partial to the colonization group.²⁸

The convention opened on June 7, and the division was immediately seen among the delegates. Victor Berger wrote in the *Vorwaerts*, "Battle Expected!"²⁹ Three factors threatened to end the career of the Social Democracy at the very opening of the convention. First, Eugene V. Debs and W. E. Burns, the top officers of the organization, announced that they were not candidates for re-election. Second, a violent debate was precipitated over the proposal to admit foreign delegates from new Chicago branches. Third, the most crucial question, whether or not the organization should become purely political, or continue its colonization policy, loomed up in a manner that showed a sharp diversity of sentiment.³⁰

Debs showed his hand when he spoke against admission of the eleven Chicago delegates, who, it was contended, had been elected by branches organized within the previous month, for the plain purpose of packing the convention. Debs was defeated on this issue, and the eleven men were seated.³¹ This was a bad omen for the partisans of political action; for those eleven delegates were of the colonization forces.

The dispute finally came to a head on Friday, June 10. The majority report of the committee on national platform called for a program which emphasized the importance of political action as the principal tenet of the organization, while the minority report accentuated the necessity of colonization as a condition precedent to the success of the party. The majority advocates were led by Victor L. Berger of Milwaukee, with Professor Hourwich and Joseph Barondass, of New York, Secretary Keliher, of the national organization, and Seymour Stedman as the most staunch supporters. W. E. Burns, Treasurer James Hogan, and Leroy Goodwin engineered the minority forces.³² At two o'clock in the morning, Berger still was making an appeal for a stronger political platform. After a great deal of violent discussion, a vote finally was taken, and the colonization forces had a majority of fifty-two against thirty-seven. At the conclusion of the vote, it was a pity, but the political action partisans showed they had prepared for such an outcome. Isaac Hourwich, of New York, immediately stood up on a chair and shouted that all those opposed to a platform emphasizing colonization should meet at the Revere House at eight o'clock—only five hours away.³³

The political action element had been defeated decisively, but they made defeat appear to be victory. Their thirty-seven delegates represented sixty-six branches of the Social Democracy,³⁴ and with that nucleus they formed a new party to supersede the old one, which fell apart, ostensibly because of lack of leadership. The platform of the secessionists was very similar to that of the preceding year, but the colonization feature was entirely removed.³⁵ In spite of the supposed set-

¹⁹*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), April 14, 1898.

²⁰*Journal*, April 6, 1898.

²¹*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), April 14, 1898.

²²*Vorwaerts*, April 13, 1898.

²³*Journal*, March 5, 1898. ²⁴*Sentinel*, March 15, 1898.

²⁵*The National Advance* (Milwaukee), April 16, 1898.

²⁶*Journal*, March 28, 1898.

²⁷*Ibid.*, June 2 and 4, 1898.

²⁸*Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1898.

²⁹June 8, 1898.

³⁰*Chicago Daily Tribune*, June 8, 1898.

³¹*Chicago Daily Dispatch*, June 8, 1898.

³²*The Chicago Chronicle*, June 11, 1898.

³³*The Social Democrat* (Chicago), June 16, 1898.

³⁴*Vorwaerts*, June 11, 1898.

³⁵*Ibid.*, June 12, 1898.

back, Milwaukee was still a stronghold of the political action socialists, along with St. Louis. In fact, a full Wisconsin ticket, headed by Howard Tuttle, of Milwaukee, was nominated in September.³⁶

Berger soon showed that his toleration of the colonization department had been toleration and nothing more. In a *Vorwaerts* editorial he censured all colonization schemes, including Brook farm and Bellamy's projects, as fiascos. He maintained that such schemes were pure utopian concepts, and that it was impossible to colonize within the capitalist system. Then, too, Berger stated that many socialists had misunderstood Debs's colonization plans. The program envisaged the concentration of Social Democrats in one state, for the purpose of capturing that state politically. Expansion was to come later. Even that plan was impossible, according to Berger, since the colonization committee of the Social Democracy was exceedingly poor.³⁷

Meanwhile, where was Eugene V. Debs during this upheaval? The Social Democracy of America had been an offspring of his colonization idea, and now this plank had disappeared. Debs's thinking had undergone quite a change since he first announced to the press that he had been converted to socialism. Perhaps his close acquaintance with Victor Berger had helped to change his views: he stayed at Berger's home on his visits to Milwaukee.³⁸ Certainly, his Milwaukee speeches showed a distinct change from his earlier statements.³⁹ At any rate, Debs became one of the leaders of the secessionists. Most of the press stories called the new party the "Debs party"; from all the evidence, it would have been more truthful to call it the "Berger party," for it was Berger who had fought consistently against colonization, and who finally forced the break.

The *Social Democrat*, which had been the official organ of the Social Democracy of America, published its last edition on June 27, 1898. With the passing of the edition, the old Social Democracy became to all intents extinct, and the new Social Democratic party of America took its place.

On July 9, 1898, the first edition of the newly created *Social Democratic Herald* appeared. This was the organ of the secessionists. It contained a very elaborate address written by the secessionists on June 16, 1898, to Social Democrats in general, including an explanation of what had happened during the first and last convention of the Social Democracy. The more important parts of the address, entitled "Why It Happened," appear here:

Comrades: There has been a division of the delegates who met in annual convention in this city in the name of the Social Democracy, beginning June 7, and ending June 11th, and the result has been the formation of a new party, known as the Social Democratic Party of America.

Soon after the convention was called to order, it became apparent that the delegates were divided into two factions, and as the deliberations proceeded the breach which separated them grew wider, and all hope of bringing them into harmonious alliance vanished.

The prime factor in the disruption of the Social Democracy was the appearance in the convention of a number of delegates representing Chicago branches, which were reported to have been organized within two or three days of the time the convention met, and these delegates were sufficient in number to control the convention. As a matter of fact they were chosen for that purpose . . . alone, and it can be proved that the branches they were alleged to represent had not, and have not now, any existence.

There was also an undercurrent to defeat independent political action. Many of the supporters of that line of thinking supported "colonization" only for that reason. However, there were honest differences of opinion concerning the colonization department. And the difference of opinion constituted the second factor of disruption.

³⁶Heath, *Social Democracy Red Book*, 69.

³⁷*Sentinel*, April 3, 1898.

³⁸*Vorwaerts*, June 24, 1898.

³⁹See above, Chapter I, pages 14-17.

A third cause of the trouble grew out of the fact that a certain number joined the Social Democracy, avowing their faith in the colonization department, who are not Social Democrats, are opposed to political action and are, in fact, opposed to the fundamental principles of the organization.

Under these circumstances, and realizing that the various elements alluded to were irreconcilable and hopelessly irreconcilable, the undersigned withdrew from the convention at the termination of the session of Friday night, 2:30 a.m., and proceeded at once to the Revere House, where it was decided to organize a new Socialist Party, composed exclusively of Socialists who subscribe to the principles and program of International Socialism.⁴⁰

That the Milwaukee Socialists participated in and sanctioned the split is clearly evident. Frederic Heath, of Milwaukee, presided at the meeting of the seceding faction, and he, Berger, and five other Milwaukeeans signed the above statement, together with the Debs brothers, Jesse Cox, Seymour Stedman, et al. Berger and Heath were chosen subsequently as two of the five members of the executive board of the new party.⁴¹

The first issue of the *Herald* also contained a dispatch of June 30, from Milwaukee, signed "Socialist." It read:

Milwaukee will line up with ten branches and the full Socialist strength that cast a vote of 4,500 at the last city election. The Milwaukee comrades are jubilant at the outcome in Chicago, as they feel that the movement has been purified thereby. It will be a pleasure for them to work for pure Socialism and without the necessity of constantly making explanations and apologies.⁴²

The colonization plank, which had caused most of the jibes to be thrown at the Social Democracy, was now gone, and the Milwaukee Social Democrats began organizing for the fall campaign. Their organization was composed of the same members as before the momentous Chicago convention.

At its first state convention, the Social Democratic party of Wisconsin nominated a full ticket. Among the nominees were three of the men who had run in the spring municipal elections in Milwaukee. They were: Howard Tuttle, candidate for governor; Thomas C. P. Myers, candidate for secretary of state; and Richard Elsner, candidate for attorney general. Berger opened the convention as state chairman, and urged the members to work hard so that the party would earn enough votes to get on the official ballot.

The platform committee of the party presented to the convention a long document including a dozen specific demands. Some of the demands were exactly the same as those introduced in the spring elections, but others were of a different character. Among the latter were: prohibition of the employment of children under sixteen years of age, and the employment of women in factories and workshops at night; the legal incorporation by the state of Wisconsin Trade Unions and Farmers' alliances, and state insurance of farmers' property against fire, hail, etc., at a rate not to exceed the cost; a graduated income and property tax to take the place of all other taxes, with the corporations paying their "just" share; universal suffrage of all adults who could read and write in any language, without distinction as to sex; direct legislation by the people, by means of the initiative and referendum; abolition of the governor's veto; proportional representation; and abolition of the state senate.⁴³

The inclusion of a farm plank followed the example set by the national platform committee, and these suggested reforms were by far the most progressive featured in the campaign. The only other reform party, the Populists, did not fuse

⁴⁰The *Social Democratic Herald* (Chicago), July 9, 1898.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Vorwaerts*, September 3, 1898.

with the Democrats in the fall elections, and came out once more for the money.⁴⁵

During the campaign, Victor Berger addressed a letter to the editor of the *Milwaukee Journal* concerning each of the competing parties. Especially vituperative were Berger's remarks about the Populists. The entire letter occupied several complete columns of the *Journal*, but a few paragraphs will suffice to give the gist of his remarks. The letter begins with an elaborate contradiction of comments made by Robert Schilling, chairman of the Populist party. Further on, it states:

... The Republican party at the present time is the expression of the conservatism of the American people. The Republican party represents the present system of production and distribution, and the interests of the so-called business men and of the capitalists. It is the capitalist party par excellence. It is not the party of the workingman or farmer.

The Democratic party, as it is constituted now, represents the people who see the danger of the concentration of capital, and who want to go back to the "good old times" when there was no production on a large scale, when everybody had a chance in life and "competition was the life of trade." The Democratic party, therefore is not conservative, it is reactionary.

The Populists virtually want the same thing as the Democratic party, only they call it "reform." Here and there are some Populist warhorses who wanted office and did not get it. They like to parade a string of Socialistically sounding phrases that fit them about as well as a string of pearls would a cow. Their main issue is the cheap money issue. This issue the Populists have in common with the most reactionary and most liberty-hating party of the civilized world, the German Junker Party. . . . But the real issues of our friends, the Populists, are the "political jobs." Whenever they get them, their cry for "reform" stops, and the capitalists have no reason to complain. . . .

The only progressive party is the Social Democratic Party which aims at the fundamental change of the present system. . . .

Therefore we say: Any man who is satisfied with the general state of things as they are, and wants to uphold them, should vote the Republican ticket. Any man who wants the wheel of progress stopped and the economic evolution turned backward should vote the Democratic ticket. Any man who is sore because he did not get a political job, or who likes to humbug others, or to be humbugged himself, should vote the Populist ticket.

And any man who believes that we have not reached the acme of civilization, and that there is a higher civilization possible will vote the Social Democratic ticket. Every man who thinks that our capitalist system, which means slavery for the worker and the business man cannot last much longer, will vote the Social Democratic ticket. Every man who knows the outcome of the present capitalist system if civilization is to survive, must be Socialism, i.e., a system where the fruits of our brilliant progress in science and of the improvement of machinery and of the present mode of production on a large scale will go to the benefit of all instead of a few—will vote the ticket of the Social Democratic party.⁴⁶

Although a considerable portion of the above letter may be described as political language pure and simple, there is no question of Berger's sincerity.

There is a significant reference in the letter to "the business man." Obviously, Berger is including small business men in the class of those who are pawns of the capitalist system, and at the same time is attempting to win them over to socialism. Mr. Berger showed himself not only a smart politician, but also a man who could adapt socialist principles to any group of persons he saw fit.

One of the most obvious tasks of socialists of those days, if they wanted to command any vote, was to state the tenets of their beliefs in such a way that they did not seem "over-revolutionary." Mr. Berger showed himself to be a master in that technique. In the letter referred to above, he made the following statement:

The Social Democratic party does not rave about the trusts and corporations. It sees that they are the legitimate outcome of competition. They would not any more decry corporations than the teething of a child, which is also connected with unpleasant phenomena.

Trusts, combines, etc., signify a step forward in civilization, while certainly not the most advanced step. And the Social Democratic party holds that the present system is quickly showing its usefulness and that it is rapidly working out its own downfall. But the next step will not be backward to competition. It will be forward to Socialism.⁴⁷

Such a statement would invoke the wrath of Daniel De Leon and many others like him, but there is no question that it is by such temporizing statements that Victor Berger and the Milwaukee Social Democratic party ultimately gained victory at the polls.

In spite of Berger's valiant efforts, the Social Democratic party fared no better in the fall elections than they did in the spring. They polled a total of only 1,214 in the statewide race.⁴⁸ However, they approached the Populist vote in the Milwaukee county returns,⁴⁹ showing that many of the old Populists had either gone over to the socialist ranks or had reverted to the Democratic party.

But whether or not the Social Democrats of Milwaukee polled many votes, it was becoming evident that they were showing an adaptability of principles which would win them more ballots in the future. When Berger took over the daily *Forward*, he embarked on a campaign to win over Milwaukee trade-union members. By 1898, he was appealing to a much larger and more varied body of voters.

⁴⁵*Ibid.* ⁴⁶*Sentinel*, November 8, 1898.

⁴⁷Permanent Election Records of the County Board of Canvassers, 1898 (at Milwaukee County Election Commission).

⁴⁸*Milwaukee Daily News*, October 10, 1898. Hereafter referred to as *Daily News*.

⁴⁹*Journal*, October 18, 1898.

UNITY, THE PRESS, AND THE UNIONS

DURING THEIR first attempts at independent politics the Social Democrats of Milwaukee found themselves in opposition, not only to the Republicans, Democrats, and Populists, but also to the older socialist party, the Socialist Labor party. Here again, the conflict did not end with the day of election. In the weeks following the election, the two socialist parties juggled the numerical results of the election in order to make them show victories of one sort or another.

In one edition of the *People*, the national organ of the S. L. P., the figures and facts were misrepresented almost beyond recognition. Instead of a loss of some two hundred votes which the S. L. P. sustained, according to reports emanating from the city clerk's office, the *People* reported an S. L. P. gain of almost two hundred votes. Likewise, the *People* conveniently forgot that the Social Democrats had appeared in politics independently for the first time in 1898, and compared their vote in that year with the Populist vote of 1896, a comparison which made it appear as if the Social Democracy had lost most of its following.¹

The Socialist Labor party at this time was freely predicting the disintegration of the Social Democratic party, but it was the former which came much closer to such a disaster. Within a year and a half after the first campaign of the Social Democrats, a great split occurred in the ranks of the Socialist Labor party. The split was not unwelcome to the Social Democrats, since it threw many informed socialists into their arms.

As early as June, 1898, the *Appeal to Reason*, a supposedly impartial socialist newspaper, had begun a weekly onslaught on De Leonism. Since the circulation of the *Appeal* among socialists was quite large, its attitude did the Socialist Labor party no good. In many cases the *Appeal* referred to the S. L. P. as merely the "New York outfit," or the "Tammany clique." The following is a good example of the type of article which appeared in J. A. Wayland's paper each week:

The Tammany clique of the New York socialists do not want any socialists whom they cannot control and no socialist press they cannot censor. But there are lots of socialists who won't have any of them or theirs. They have so far been able to control the party machinery, and as they own it of course they have that right. With twelve years' work they have not made any headway in getting the socialist movement before the people and do not want it unless they have a dead cinch on it. Let socialists who do not wish to bow to their rule perfect an organization better suited to the time and country. . . . Having dropped the colonization feature, it appears to me that the Social Democratic party could be made a vehicle for this element of socialists who outnumber the Tammany organization many to one. The *Appeal* has never taken sides on party tactics, preferring to remain an educator, but it sees, and has for a long time, that the Tammany method is not the method that will win this country, even if it were in the hands of men who had the confidence and love of socialists.²

A year after the above article appeared, the *Appeal to Reason* was able to carry a story on the splitting of the S. L. P. into two distinct factions. The two factions represented the two papers of the S. L. P., the *Volkszeitung* and the *People*. The *Volkszeitung* group was led by Morris Hillquit, while the *People* faction followed Daniel De Leon. In several hectic meetings on July 8 and 10, 1899, these two groups fought each other in action as well as word, and two separate Socialist Labor parties took the place of one.³ Eventually the followers of

De Leon held forth as the only Socialist Labor party, while the followers of Hillquit moved towards the Social Democratic party.

Milwaukee Social Democrats had less interest in the S. L. P. split than did Social Democrats elsewhere. Dissatisfied S. L. P. members had already bolted that party in Milwaukee and had joined the Social Democratic party. However, the question of uniting "Kangaroo" elements of the S. L. P. with the Social Democratic party concerned Milwaukee Social Democrats as a question affecting the composition and methods of their national party. They were afraid that any union with S. L. P. members would involve a change in the name and tactics of the Social Democratic party.

These Milwaukeeans came out strongly in their new paper against such a union.⁴ They maintained that certain elements in the anti-boss S. L. P. faction "are the very counterpart of Mr. Daniel De Leon, without Daniel's brains." Further, they insisted that the name "Social Democratic Party" and the tactics employed by the latter party had to stand. To Milwaukee Social Democrats, their party name stood for democratic socialism and democratic socialist tactics, and they believed that the distinction between that type of socialism and other types had to be emphasized.⁵ Repeatedly this point was made and repeatedly the *Milwaukee Social Democrat* appeared with articles directed against any union with the Kangaroos who still stood in large measure for De Leonism.⁶

Nevertheless, an outward appearance of unity was accomplished in the spring of 1900 at the Social Democratic party convention at Indianapolis. Through the efforts of Victor Berger, Eugene V. Debs was prevailed upon to head the "unity" ticket as its candidate for president. Job Harriman, of California, was named candidate for vice-president, thus giving the Kangaroos representation on the ticket. It was understood that the name of the united party would be the Social Democratic party, and that essentials of the amalgamation would be submitted to a referendum vote.⁷

It was not long after this convention that the entire unity proceedings were imperilled. The S. L. P. faction made statements which led many to believe that the Social Democratic party had been swallowed up by the Kangaroos. This led to recriminations back and forth between the two camps until it looked as if the socialist movement in America was doomed.⁸

Fortunately, the presidential campaign took up most of the energies of the disputing socialists, and when the united ticket polled an encouraging vote of close to 97,000, both camps were ready for a real unity convention.⁹

Finally, then, after more than a year of wrangling, the Social Democratic party and the Kangaroo element of the Socialist Labor party cooperated in holding a unity convention in Indianapolis, beginning July 29, 1901, and lasting for four days. The constitution drawn up at the unity convention stipulated that "the name of the organization shall be the Socialist party of America, except in states

¹The nickname "Kangaroo" was applied to the Hillquit faction by the De Leonites, and afterwards was used in all socialist circles to describe this group. The term came out of the West, where, before conditions had settled, lawyers and judges would jump from place to place setting up a court, holding trials, collecting fees, and then departing. Often these lawyers and judges were impostors, and their fake courts were called "Kangaroo courts." Henry Kuhn and Olive M. Johnson, *The Socialist Labor Party, 1890-1930* (New York, 1931), 34.

²The first issue of *The Milwaukee Social Democrat* appeared February 17, 1900.

³*The Milwaukee Social Democrat*, March 3, 1900.

⁴*Ibid.*, April 7, 1900. *Ibid.*, March 17, 1900.

⁵Letter from Theodore Debs to all branches of the Social Democratic party, August 19, 1900 (in *Milwaukee County Historical Society*).

⁶Andrew J. Biemiller, "History of American Socialism," in *Thirty-fifth Anniversary Journal of Socialist Party* (Cleveland, 1926).

¹*The People* (New York), April 17, 1898.

²*The Appeal to Reason* (Girard, Kansas), July 2, 1898.

³*Ibid.*, July 16 and 22, 1899; *The People* (New York), July 16 and 23, 1899.

where a different name has or may become a legal requirement.²⁰ Each state was granted autonomy in matters of organization.²¹ Thus, Milwaukee and Wisconsin Socialists kept the name Social Democratic Party, and pursued the same policies as theretofore.

A very long editorial appeared in the second edition of the *Social Democratic Herald* after its removal to Milwaukee, which explained in detail the stand of the Wisconsin Socialists in regard to the new name of the national party. The title of the editorial was more expressive than those found in most newspapers: "There Are Many Socialisms, but Only One Social Democracy." Some of the most significant sections of the editorial follow:

The change of name for the national party by the recent convention was deemed a political necessity. In several states the use of the old name was impossible under provisions of the election laws. In other states, where its use is permissible, and a legal standing has been attained as in Wisconsin, the name Social Democratic Party will be retained.²²

This provision, as provided for in the new constitution, has already been mentioned. From here the editorial went on to enumerate the multitude of socialisms, and to emphasize the need for a definition of the socialism of Americans. Among the types of socialisms mentioned were feudal, clerical, Christian, and utopian socialism. None of these types was considered American. Americans prided themselves as being followers of scientific socialism. But, the editorial continued,

... Even within the so-called scientific conceptions of Socialism we can see distinctly two different kinds of Socialism:

1. Autocratic Socialism, which aims to rule nations by a strongly concentrated power, constituted in committees or delegates, which form of government must ultimately lead to an hierarchy or a strong bureaucracy.

2. Social Democracy, which would vest the power in the people at large, with due regard for the rights of minorities.

It is natural enough that there should be such differences in the Socialistic tendencies. Socialism itself is an economic, and not a political term. It is actually possible for a socialist state to be consistent with the most fearful tyranny the world has ever seen, for the ruling power would also have hold of the bread of the people in a vastly greater degree than is the case today. On the other hand, Socialism may and will bring to humanity the greatest liberty it has yet enjoyed, by making everyone the master of his own sustenance, by taking away the worry for daily bread. . . .

Our aim is Social Democracy. That means Socialism and Democracy. It means the collective ownership, by the whole people, and also the rule of the whole people, and as much freedom as possible for all of them, as otherwise, even the democracy would become the most oppressive of tyrannies. We mean, therefore, to reserve as much right for the individual as is consistent with the welfare of all. . . .

Our aim being the Social Democracy, we . . . cannot go any faster than the Democracy, the people, will permit.

We say all this in justification and elucidation of the term and the meaning Social Democracy, and in order to convince the thoughtful reader that the retention of the name Social Democratic party in Wisconsin and other states is perfectly consistent with close relationship and loyalty to the national party under the less definite name, Socialist party, which though not as satisfactory to us, is the national party of Wisconsin Social Democrats.²³

The last words of the editorial clearly expressed the sentiments of Milwaukee and Wisconsin Socialists. They were very much in favor of keeping the name Social Democratic, as descriptive of the aims and methods of their party, but if it were better for the national welfare of the party to adopt a more general name, they would not let that fact sway in any way their connection to the national party. Although the Milwaukee Social Democrats had been openly opposed to uniting

with the Kangaroo S. L. P. men in 1900, that attitude was not manifested among them at the unity convention of 1901.²⁴

The announcement of the stand taken by Milwaukee Social Democrats appeared in the second edition of the *Social Democratic Herald* after its removal from Chicago to Milwaukee.²⁵ The moving of the Socialist party press to Milwaukee was significant in many respects. It marked the attainment of a goal toward which the Milwaukee Social Democrats had been striving for almost a decade, the establishment of an English language newspaper to sponsor the socialist news and beliefs.

Milwaukee's Social Democratic press had its beginning in 1893, when Victor L. Berger took over the *Arbeiter Zeitung* and changed its name to the *Vorwaerts*. Along with the daily *Vorwaerts*, Berger published another German paper, the weekly *Wahrheit*. In August, 1897, Berger was forced to discontinue the daily edition of the *Vorwaerts* for lack of financial support, and the socialists had only two weekly German papers in Milwaukee. It was about this time that Heath and Berger attempted to enlist Daniel De Leon as editor of a contemplated daily socialist paper. As related in the last chapter, those plans fell through. However, in that same year the Social Democracy of America was established, and Milwaukee had a socialist outlet in the English language, through the *Social Democrat* which was published in Chicago. In July, 1898, the *Social Democratic Herald* replaced the *Social Democrat*, as a result of the June split in the Social Democracy. Milwaukee news played a prominent part in that paper; in fact, Fred Heath edited several editions of the papers while the regular editor was stumping the country for socialism.

From November 26, 1898, to June 17, 1899, the *Social Democratic Herald* was published from Belleville, Illinois, so that a larger paper could be printed at the same price. During that time little Milwaukee news appeared in it, and the need of an English language socialist paper was acutely felt. Finally the *Milwaukee Social Democrat* was launched in February, 1900. The cost of publication, and the cost to the subscribers, were both too heavy and the paper was forced to discontinue publication after April 21, having lived just two months and survived through one election. The subscription list of the *Milwaukee Social Democrat* was turned over to the *Appeal to Reason* which was published by "the one boss philosopher," J. A. Wayland, at Girard, Kansas. Fred Heath, who had been editor of the *Milwaukee Social Democrat*, then edited a Wisconsin Department in the *Appeal* for four months.

Meanwhile, the *Social Democratic Herald* was becoming a burden on Debs and the national party, so in August, 1901, it was removed to Milwaukee, where the Social Democratic name still held, and where the power of the party had been growing each year. It was truly a sign of the strength of Social Democracy in Milwaukee that they were given the opportunity, and were able to take over the national organ of the Socialist party. Although the *Herald* was only a weekly, its removal to Milwaukee was the greatest step yet taken towards the establishment of a daily socialist paper in that city. That dream was to come true just a decade later when the vaunted *Milwaukee Leader* was established on December 7, 1911.²⁶

²⁰*Ibid.*, August 17, 1901.

²¹The *Social Democratic Herald* (Milwaukee), August 21, 1901.

²²The *Social Democratic Herald* (Milwaukee), August 17, 1901. This is the first Milwaukee edition of the paper.

²³*Ibid.*, August 24, 1901.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵The information contained in the above paragraphs concerning the story of Milwaukee's socialist press was garnered directly from the files of all the newspapers mentioned. Although the *Social Democratic Herald* was moved to Milwaukee, it no longer represented the national headquarters.

The appearance of the *Social Democratic Herald* in Milwaukee was the manifestation of a very close alliance between the socialists and the Federated Trades Council. For it was the support of the Trades Council in endorsing the paper as its official publication, in furthering subscriptions to the paper, and in financial assistance to it, which in a large measure made its long existence possible.

The early relations between the socialists and the trade-unionists are touched upon in the two succeeding chapters. However, it may be well to emphasize here the salient fact that the socialists of Milwaukee aligned themselves with the Populists and other groups only in order to win over the workingmen to their beliefs. Two sample quotations from the *Vorwaerts* will demonstrate their tactics. One appeared in the spring campaign of 1894 as follows:

Vote the Cooperative Labor ticket. . . . Although our platform does not embody all the editors of this paper would wish to include in it, yet it compares like day to night with the platforms of the other parties. . . .²⁷

During the congressional elections of the same year an even more expressive appeal was made to the laboring class:

Workingmen! Vote the populist ticket. Vote for principles, not for good men. Then in case the People's Party betrays the noble principles expressed in its platform, the same will be taken up by the socialists inside or outside the People's Party and the fight will be fought to a successful end.²⁸

In this same year, despite agreements with the Populists, Victor Berger, a member of the International Typographical Union, led a movement at the convention of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor to establish a separate socialist party which would serve as the political aim of the trade-unionists. Since the Populists had already called their convention, the Federation decided to cooperate and send delegates to that convention, and requested socialist societies and trade-unions to do likewise.²⁹ Berger and the socialists cooperated, but they never ceased trying to put socialism across to the unionists. By the end of 1896, they no longer cooperated with the Populists, and within two years their non-cooperation had turned to violent opposition.

It has already been noted that the Federated Trades Council of Milwaukee endorsed the Social Democracy in 1897 and 1898, yet as late as March, 1899, the *Vorwaerts* complained that the Federated Trades Council was practically in the hands of anti-socialist labor leaders. According to the *Vorwaerts* these leaders struck bargains with other political parties to "deliver the vote." Furthermore, it accused these leaders of organizing new central bodies frequently, for the sole purpose of demonstrating to politicians of the older parties the great influence of their organizers. Thus, the Northwestern Advisory Committee of the Trade Union was formed. Similarly, the Council of the Building Trades was organized. The latter was noted for its vehemence against the socialists. This "carpenters council" went so far as to declare a boycott against the *Vorwaerts* for attacking labor leaders.³⁰

It is certain, then, that the socialists had not won their struggle for supremacy in the Federated Trades Council in the spring of 1899. However, by December, they had made a great advance in that endeavor. In that month a general meeting of the Federated Trades Council elected, with a large majority, an executive committee composed exclusively of socialists, and including Victor Berger.³¹ Techni-

cally, the fact that these men elected were all socialists was a mere coincidence; actually, it meant that the Social Democratic party had the almost unanimous support of Milwaukee trade-unionists. Still, the socialists on the executive committee had to remember that trade-unionists were not all members of their party. The advice which the *Vorwaerts* gave to the new executive committee was prudent, and was characteristic of the tact sometimes employed by Berger and his colleagues:

It is the duty of the Socialists in the Federated Trades Council to use their success with moderation, and not to forget for a single moment that, although a trade-union is a proletarian class organization . . . yet a trade-union must never be dragged into a purely political struggle. Democrats, Republicans, Populists and Prohibitionists must all alike belong to the trade-union, else the latter fails to fulfill its purpose. However, the seventy trade-unions affiliated with the Federated Trades Council offer us a broad field for our revolutionary agitation of the Social-Democratic type of socialism.³²

Certainly, this advice shows that the socialists realized the good will of the trade-union world would contribute to the ultimate success of the Social Democratic party.

Actually at this time without the support of the trade-unions, the socialists were leaders without a following. Consequently, they stressed tact in their dealings with the trade-unions, and emphasized in their platforms the immediate things in which workingmen were interested. These Milwaukee Social Democrats were unquestionably willing to compromise, and in that respect they differed greatly from the older socialists who still held to the Socialist Labor party.

Not long after the all-socialist executive committee was chosen by the Federated Trades Council, the opposition group showed its feeling. On the evening of February 2, 1900, Victor Berger proposed a resolution to a meeting of the Council to elect delegates to the city convention of the Social Democratic party. A great deal of wrangling followed in the discussion of his resolution, but it was finally carried by a vote of sixty-three to thirty-five. Three delegates, Robert Schroeder, Frederick Brockhausen, and Charles Kunde were chosen to represent the Trades Council. But the sentiment was expressed in one of the Milwaukee papers that it was likely several of the unions would withdraw from the Council, if the executive board of the American Federation of Labor sustained the action of the local council.³³

One hundred forty-seven delegates appeared at the convention of the Social Democrats, and of these, seventy-seven were trade-union delegates.³⁴ This merely meant that seventy-seven of the delegates elected to the convention were trade-union members, and not as the *Vorwaerts* implied, direct delegates from their trade-unions. The platform adopted was similar to that of 1898, and only trade-union members were nominated. Frederic Heath was the choice for mayor.³⁵ In addition, the convention passed this unique resolution regarding trade-unions:

Whereas, the trade-unionist movement is the inevitable manifestation of the struggle between Capital and Labor and is indispensable in order to withstand the enormous power of Capital, and to protect the standard of living of the Proletariat

Be it, therefore resolved

That, we endorse the resolutions passed by our National Convention, and require all our members to join their respective trade unions where such exist; further that we recommend to all our party members to respect and patronize every existing union label, and further

Be it resolved,

That the exploitation of the working-class will cease only when the whole people will

²⁷*Vorwaerts*, March 31, 1894.

²⁸*Ibid.*, November 3, 1894.

²⁹*Wisconsin Labor*, 1924 (Milwaukee, 1924). Historical sketch of 1894 convention in this year book of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor. No page numbers are given.

³⁰*Vorwaerts*, March 5, 1899.

³¹*Ibid.*, December 24, 1899.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Daily News*, February 3, 1900.

³⁴*Vorwaerts*, February 10, 1900.

³⁵*The Milwaukee Social Democrat*, March 23, 1900.

obtain the control over the process of production and distribution, and that we therefore regard and brandmark as traitors to the cause of labor all those labor-leaders who try for personal benefits, to obscure the class-consciousness of the working class and to sell the working people to the Capitalist parties.²⁶

By such a resolution the Social Democrats bluntly expressed their feelings regarding the trade-union movement. At the same time they censured in clear language those labor leaders who opposed the efforts of the Social Democratic party to win the labor vote.

On February 21, the delegates of the Federated Trades Council to the municipal convention of the Social Democratic party, read their report to a general meeting of the Council. After some discussion, the Council endorsed the Social Democratic slate by a vote of 53 to 23.²⁷ At this juncture the split which had been suspected when delegates were first sent to the Socialist convention broke into the open. About a dozen anti-socialists left the meeting in protest, and nine of this dozen ultimately resigned from the Council.²⁸ The anti-socialists drew up an appeal to the executive council of the American Federation of Labor, but nothing resulted from it. The A. F. of L. through its national organizer, Frank J. Weber, stated that no notice had been taken of the appeal, because it had not been properly addressed to the executive council. Any such appeal had to have the endorsement of the local and national organizations of which the appealers were members. Instead, the appeal had been sent directly with no endorsement whatsoever.

Through a technicality, the American Federation of Labor had been able to sidestep the issue. Mr. Weber, who was incidentally a Milwaukeean and a staunch socialist, refused to say whether or not he thought the A. F. of L. would request the Federated Trades Council to rescind its action as a violation of the constitution of the A. F. of L. if the appeal were properly made.²⁹ Consequently, it appeared as if the Social Democrats had won a real victory over their opponents in the Federated Trades Council. Preparing for the forthcoming political campaign, the Social Democrats let go a barrage of propaganda aimed at winning the vote of the trade-unions. The newly created *Milwaukee Social Democrat* managed to last out the campaign and served as a valuable addition to the *Vorwaerts*. Innumerable articles in that paper explained the folly of labor leaders who opposed political action.³⁰ Slogans such as the following appeared on the editorial page of every edition: "Trades unionism is the class struggle on the economic field. Trade union politics is the class struggle on the political field. Paste this in your hat brother union men."³¹ Another typical appeal to the trade-unions:

Your interests are identical. Is it not folly for one-half the working class to vote against the other half? Shall we be as wise as the capitalists and unite for our protection? Shall we unite in a political party representing our class interests, or shall we continue to be divided, voting against one another and against ourselves?³²

In spite of their victories within the Trades Council and their newspaper campaign, the Social Democrats fared no better in the spring election of 1900 than they had two years previously. Again the vote for mayor was under 2,600, and the *Vorwaerts* did not hide its feelings. It remarked: "We would be untruthful if we said we were satisfied with the results of the last two municipal elections."³³

The day of Social Democratic victories at the polls had not yet arrived, but the organization was becoming stronger.

There has been a great deal of talk around trade-union circles in late years that the Federated Trades Council never made any official recognition of the Social Democratic party, and that any connection which did exist was merely coincidental. A glance through the minutes of the Council between the years 1900 and 1910 will dissipate any such conception. It is true that all members of the Council were not socialists. Even after the seemingly final victory over their opponents in February and March, 1900, anti-socialist voices were heard from time to time. In October, 1901, Typographical Union No. 23 served a virtual ultimatum on the Council for it to discontinue all discussions of socialism and other political issues on pain of losing the printers' delegates. A lively discussion followed the announcement of the ultimatum in the meeting of the Council. Finally it was decided that socialism was not politics, but a scientific study of economic questions with a view to bettering the conditions of wage slaves. The printers' motion was tabled by a vote of fifty-six against five, and nothing more was heard of the matter for some time.³⁴

In the meantime, a special committee had been appointed by the Council to visit all the local unions in the interests of the Social Democracy. The minutes of almost every meeting carried a note that the stated committee had been well-received or had met with a favorable response from the local unions. Likewise, communications were received from various units announcing that they recognized the Social Democratic party as the Union Labor party.³⁵

The following which Eugene Debs had among union men did the Social Democrats no harm. At least in one instance the Federated Trades Council passed a resolution to march in a body and hear Debs speak during one of his campaign stops to Milwaukee. On this occasion Debs was also to be presented with a floral emblem.³⁶ The impression left to readers of the Trades Council's minutes written during the early 1900's is that the members of the Council were vitally interested in disseminating socialist ideas among their fellow unionists.

In October, 1901, a resolution by the Pattern Makers was passed which stated that all trade-unions in the city were to be visited with the suggestion that they subscribe in a body to the *Social Democratic Herald*, which had been named the official organ of the Federated Trades Council.³⁷ Almost a year before that resolution, a letter had been circularized among union men in the interests of socialism, including these words:

Bear in mind that of all things most feared by the expropriating capitalist class is knowledge when possessed by the wage-slave! Knowledge is power, and as socialism teaches and carries with it the full understanding of wage-slavery and the competitive system, we urge the members of your organization to investigate and study its economic teachings.³⁸

For such resolutions to be passed, and such letters to be circularized, there must certainly have been a very strong Social Democratic sentiment in the Trades Council.

That sentiment was further expressed in the platforms of both the Federated Trades Council, and the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor. Many of the planks in those platforms were direct copies of the Social Democratic planks in

²⁶*Vorwaerts*, February 10, 1900. ²⁷*The Milwaukee Social Democrat*, March 3, 1900.

²⁸*Ibid.*; *Daily News*, February 22, 1900.

²⁹*Daily News*, March 5, 1900; *The Milwaukee Social Democrat*, March 10, 1900.

³⁰*The Milwaukee Social Democrat*, March 3, 10, 17, 1900.

³¹*Ibid.*, March 3, 1900.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Vorwaerts*, April 8, 1900.

³⁴Minutes of the Federated Trades Council, October 16, 1901 (at Federated Trades Council headquarters, Milwaukee). ³⁵*Ibid.*, October 3, 17 ff., 1900. ³⁶*Ibid.*, October 17 and 31, 1900.

³⁷*Ibid.*, October 2, 1901.

³⁸*Ibid.*, December 19, 1900.

both national and municipal spheres. They included: collective ownership of all the means of production, distribution, communication and transportation; municipal ownership of public utilities; the establishment of postal savings banks; direct legislation by referendum; free use of halls in municipal buildings, so that citizens could discuss public questions.³⁰ As a matter of fact, the Social Democrats liked the platform of the Federated Trades Council so well that they came out with a front-page editorial headed with the words: "We Congratulate the Federated Trades Council for Their Resolution and Platform Planks."³¹

One of the tactics which helped win the trade-unionists for socialism was the policy of the Social Democrats to make trade-unionism as important as socialism in the socialist press. In one particular article the *Social Democratic Herald* stated that the first aim of the trade-unions was to weld together all available workmen into one organization. If politics interfered with that aim, said the *Herald*, it should be left out. The connection of the socialists and the trade-union, according to the *Herald* was this:

Socialists start from the idea that the trade unions are intensely interested in introducing social reform, and that they are therefore in duty bound to discuss these matters and use all means, especially the ballot to secure good results.³²

Using the ballot, of course, meant voting the Social Democratic ticket. The Social Democrats of Milwaukee made it clear that there should be no catering to reformers of the old parties, whose final aim was by no means the liberation of the workingman.³³

Throughout the minutes of the Federated Trades Council during the period under discussion, the Social Democrats were given verbal bouquets, while politicians of the capitalist parties were condemned. Only once in the years 1900-1910 were the Social Democrats censured in the minutes and that was in 1907 when they failed to nominate candidates for the school board election. That state of affairs was readily remedied by the Council; it named four genuine socialists to its school board slate,³⁴ and was satisfied when two of them were elected.³⁵ Dave Rose, the colorful Democratic mayor, came in for more than the average share of abuse by the Trades Council,³⁶ but the choice resolution against the opposition was that drawn against John I. Beggs:

Whereas, John I. Beggs, president of the Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company has used the expression "To hell with the Social-Democrats" when Alderman Strehlow asked for better street car service for the northwest side of the city, and

Whereas, The Social Democratic party is the political expression of the working class and is fighting our battles on the political field, and

Whereas, John I. Beggs, once upon a time an honest sausage maker, has now become one of the most unscrupulous exploiters and labor skimmers in the country; therefore be it

Resolved, That we hereby express our confidence and our thanks to Brother August Strehlow, the alderman of the twentieth ward, and at the same time our deepest contempt for John I. Beggs, the former sausage maker, now wholesale exploiter and labor skinner.³⁷

Several meetings after the resolution about Mr. Beggs was passed, a letter was sent to the Executive Council of the American Federation of Labor, in answer to a previous bulletin from that body. The Federated Trades Council here announced its refusal to back any candidate of a capitalist party for public

office. In defense of its position, it referred to its charter which forbade the body from endorsing any political party or candidate.³⁸ This letter is especially interesting, since the Trades Council repeatedly endorsed the Social Democratic party and its candidates, and paid no attention to the provisions of its charter in such cases. To make matters more convincing, prominent Socialist party speakers, from outside the city, often were brought in to speak before the meetings of the Council.³⁹

If the data thus far given have not proved that the connection between the Social Democrats and the Federated Trades Council was more than coincidental, perhaps a look at some financial matters will supply that proof. As early as October, 1903, the sum of fifty dollars was appropriated to the campaign fund of the Social Democratic party by a vote of seventy-four to six.⁴⁰ In spite of that appropriation, the Council, in answer to a protest by the Printing Pressmen's Union, implicitly denied that it had ever aided the Social Democrats with funds.⁴¹ In March, 1902, a pledge of twenty-five dollars was "moved to take its regular course" in order to assist the Social Democratic party in its spring campaign.⁴² Similar amounts were contributed throughout the first decade of the twentieth century.

The work of the *Social Democratic Herald* in furthering the cause of trade-unionism was admittedly good, and withstood attempts of the Typographical Union to push it from its position as the official paper of the Federated Trades Council.⁴³ By January, 1910, the Council owned forty-eight shares in the Social Democratic Publishing Company, at five dollars per share,⁴⁴ but its financial assistance to the company in the preceding years had amounted to much more than that sum, in loans and direct contributions.⁴⁵

Today, the belief is voiced by Milwaukee trade-unionists that Frank Weber and Fred Brockhausen, two of the leaders of the Federated Trades Council, and also of the Social Democratic party, were opposed to any intimate connection between their party and their Trades Council. The contention is that it was only Victor Berger who tried to push Trades Council donations to the Social Democrats, and other such measures. One incident occurred in a Federated Trades Council meeting in 1902 which may put a slightly different slant on that contention. In the meeting referred to, Victor Berger questioned the advisability of the Council's making a donation to the party. He said that because of the ill feeling engendered as a result of previous donations, the Social Democratic party would rather have a simple declaration of the Council's good will than a sum of money. Immediately after Berger was seated, Brockhausen arose and questioned Berger's right to decline a gift to the party. The matter was put to a vote, and the Council donated one hundred dollars, the largest sum thus far recorded in the minutes, to the campaign fund of the Social Democratic party.⁴⁶

The sum total of all these facts, most of them found in the minutes of the Federated Trades Council, clearly indicates that between 1900 and 1910, the Milwaukee trade-unions and the Social Democratic party were closely allied. Their memberships overlapped to a large degree, and by 1910, the result for which the socialists had been striving—to make their party the political arm of the trade-union movement—had surely been reached. True, the unions as such had nothing

³⁰Constitution and By-Laws of the Federated Trades Council, 1901 (Milwaukee, 1901); *The Social Democratic Herald* (Milwaukee), August 31, 1901.

³¹*The Social Democratic Herald* (Milwaukee), August 31, 1901.

³²*Ibid.*, December 15, 1901.

³³*Ibid.*, May 28, 1904.

³⁴Minutes of the Federated Trades Council, March 6, 1907.

³⁵*Journal*, April 3, 1907.

³⁶Minutes of the Federated Trades Council, March 29 and June 3, 1908.

³⁷*Ibid.*, June 3, 1908.

³⁸*Ibid.*, August 19, 1908.

³⁹*Ibid.*, October 3, 1900.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, October 7, 1903.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, October 15, 1902.

⁴²*Ibid.*, January 4, February 15, 1905, August 21, 1907.

⁴³*Ibid.*, December 4, 1901.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, March 5, 1902.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, January 5, 1910.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, October, 1901, to January, 1910.

to do with organizing or conducting the affairs of the Social Democratic party nor had the party any voice in the conduct of the unions. However, it is now worthy that most of the same men who guided the affairs of the unions, also guided the affairs of the Social Democratic party of Milwaukee and Wisconsin. A kind of "interlocking directorate" existed between the two movements. There is no evidence that a Republican or Democratic "boss" controlled the unions of these years, as they did in other big industrial cities. With few exceptions, the secretaries, business agents, and executive officers of the unions, were active members of the Social Democratic party; very often they were the candidates for public office of that party. Berger, Heath, Brockhausen, Weber, Berner, Melms, Coleman, Elsner, and Strehlow are only a few of the names of outstanding trade-unionists who were victorious at the polls under the Social Democratic banner.⁶⁶

⁶⁶*History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victories*, opposite page 48.

THE FIRST TASTE OF VICTORY

IN ITS FIRST attempts at politics, the Social Democratic party of Milwaukee attained no great heights.⁶⁷ The municipal elections of 1898 and 1900 each netted the Socialists under 2,600 votes.⁶⁸ However, in the gubernatorial race of 1900, they showed a remarkable gain of some two thousand votes.⁶⁹

In spite of the progress which had been demonstrated during 1900, the Milwaukee Social Democrats were far from satisfied. They admitted that the socialist cooperative commonwealth could only be established on a national or perhaps even international scale. But that was no reason, to them, why the workingman should not vote the Social Democratic ticket in municipal elections. According to the socialist press, municipal elections were more important to the working class, and to the progress of socialism, than national elections. Such a conclusion was reached by the reasoning that the cooperative commonwealth was a long way off, and that before socialism carried the nation, it must carry a good many cities.⁷⁰

The leaders of the party gained more enthusiasm with each election, and with each enlargement of the party membership. Victor Berger expressed their ardor in a speech on January 5, 1902, in which he said:

We have the best organization we ever had. Excepting Massachusetts, we have in Wisconsin the best Socialistic state in the union, and in proportion to population Milwaukee casts a greater Socialistic vote than other cities of its size or larger. There has not before been so much enthusiasm shown for the cause since I became interested in the work seven or eight years ago, and there is no other city in the country where trades unionism and the Social Democracy have become so thoroughly merged.⁷¹

In their fervor the party officers enjoyed the inconveniences entailed by the growth of the party. It was a long time before their headquarters appeared like those of a respected political party, but even when their offices overlapped into a flat, with Victor Berger using the kitchen, Frederic Heath a bedroom, and secretary Melms and others the parlor, the party leaders were content. Each expansion increased their faith in ultimate victory.⁷²

On January 4, 1902, the party central committee announced its spring convention for the first week of February.⁷³ At the same time it launched its campaign to win those constituents who were in favor of a change in the political and economic system, yet were of a conservative nature. There were still many Milwaukeeans to whom socialism meant the sudden overturn of the capitalist system, and to whom Marx was an enigma. The *Herald* catered to these people by saying:

Capitalism will not vanish in one day, in one year or in one decade. Even after the triumph of the proletariat, the commonwealth cannot take upon itself all kinds of production. . . . It is not necessary that all industries be immediately taken over by the Socialist government.⁷⁴

⁶⁷*Forerunner*, April 8, 1900. ⁶⁸*The Milwaukee Social Democrat*, April 14, 1900.

⁶⁹*The Social Democratic Herald* (Milwaukee), April 5, 1902. Hereafter referred to as *Herald*.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, November 16, 1901. The Socialist Labor party could not subscribe to the type of reasoning outlined by the Social Democrats.

⁷¹*Milwaukee Free Press*, January 6, 1902. Hereafter referred to as *Free Press*.

⁷²Conversation of author with Mr. Heath, June 16, 1942.

⁷³*Herald*, January 4, 1902. The mode of representation for the convention was as follows: one delegate at large in every ward, and also an additional delegate for every fifty votes (or major fraction thereof) cast at the last general election; for trade-unions, one delegate at large and an additional delegate for every hundred members or major fraction thereof. ⁷⁴*Ibid.*

The editorial writers of the *Herald*, who were also officers of the Social Democratic party, were sincere in such statements. Victor Berger was their philosophical guide, and he was outspoken in his partiality to conservative socialism. He often made declarations like the following: "We do not care a . . . whether our Socialism be Marxian or otherwise, as long as we change the present system and emancipate all the people and especially the proletariat."⁹

At their city convention the Social Democrats approved a platform which was almost identical with those of 1898 and 1900. Even the wording was maintained almost in its entirety. Significant of events to come was the inclusion of a paragraph in the preamble concerning corruption in municipal affairs:

The mainspring of corruption in municipal affairs is usually found in the fact that a few aldermen or officials have it in their power to give away or sell franchises to capitalists who thereby make millions. The temptation thus afforded our public officials, to try and secure a share in the millions given away, is too great for the average man to withstand. If the city would operate its public utilities, the motive and the opportunity for bribes would be gone. . . . The Social Democracy, therefore objects to more competition in public utilities; more competition means more corruption.¹⁰

From the time the Social Democrats of Milwaukee first entered independent politics, they had deplored the method of issuing franchises to private companies. The words employed had been consistently the same, and in 1903, they became a slogan of the Social Democratic party against a regime of corruption.¹¹

The Social Democratic ticket for the 1902 election included four staunch union men: Howard Tuttle for mayor; Eugene H. Rooney for comptroller; John Doerfler for city treasurer; and Theodore Burmeister for city attorney. In the issue of the *Herald* containing the Social Democratic ticket and its platform, the editors included a statement which appeared very much like a Berger analogy:

Do not think the occasion to be too insignificant because this is only a municipal election. Nothing is insignificant in a great war. It was a series of small and in themselves insignificant skirmishes that led to the great battle of Sedan and decided the fate of an empire. Milwaukee Socialists form a vanguard in this great battle for the cooperative commonwealth.¹²

Repeatedly, reference was made to the importance of municipal Socialist victories.

In their spring campaign of 1902, the Social Democrats made open and determined attempts to capture a more varied body of voters. As early as January 20, the central committee of the party decided to circulate a large amount of socialist literature among the Italians of Milwaukee's third ward in an effort to gain their vote. Nels Anderson and other socialist leaders believed that the Italians would prove a valuable addition to the Social Democracy and that as soon as the literature arrived from Chicago it should be spread freely among them. During the meeting of the central committee, the charge was made that it had been the habit of the Jefferson Democracy of the city to send a number of Italian voters away in freight cars whenever there were symptoms that they were not in harmony with the principles of the party. It was resolved that the Social Democrats would see to it that no such thing occurred in 1902.¹³

Likewise, an attempt was made to win a portion of the Polish vote for socialism. The Poles were generally strong Catholics, and Catholic priests from their pulpits continually denounced socialism and the Social Democratic party as heretical, atheistic, and anarchistic. The files of the *Herald* are filled with denunciations by Catholic priests, and answers by prominent socialists. Conse-

quently, it was a boon to the Socialists to be able to call on one Catholic priest, who was actually a member of the Socialist party, for support. Father Thomas H. McGrady of Louisville, Kentucky, had written some socialist treatises, so that he could be called on for help among the Poles of the city. At a city central meeting of the party early in February, it was decided to order three hundred copies of one of Father McGrady's books, *Beyond the Black Ocean*, and to have it distributed in a special Polish edition among Polish workingmen. At this meeting the campaign committee also was enjoined to engage a competent Polish speaker for service in the approaching campaign.¹⁴ Father McGrady was not available for the spring campaign, though attempts were made to get him. However, he did present two memorable speeches on May 10, 1902, which helped the Socialist cause a great deal.¹⁵

It was taken for granted that Mayor David Rose would be nominated for reelection by the Democrats, and this feeling was correct. Rose was nominated by acclamation at the Democratic Convention early in March.¹⁶ Before his nomination, the Social Democrats had begun criticizing his political machine, and warning the business element of Milwaukee not to reelect him. The following quotation shows that the method of appealing to the business man was still somewhat rude:

True we do not like the rule of the Rose machine; it means the rule of the corrupt and criminal elements of this city. Yet, after all, workmen can stand two years more of such rule as easily as the "business element" of Milwaukee. And if the business men do not like it and want to see a way out of it let them read and study the platform of the Social Democratic party and act afterwards as honesty and consistency will tell them.¹⁷

But the business element had no faith in a socialist appeal this early.

To summarize: The Social Democrats had inaugurated a campaign designed in appeal to a varied lot of voters. They wanted to hold their trade-unionist vote, and also to add Italian and Polish constituents. Moreover, they appealed to the business men wherever it was possible.

The Social Democratic conception of a political campaign by no means fits into the pigeon-hole designed for it by the Republicans and Democrats. Soap boxes were not an indispensable adjunct of a Social Democratic campaign. In this respect the advice given to socialist members by leaders of the party on the eve of the campaign was interesting. Its beginning reads like the counsel of a father to a son, or of a preacher to his congregation:

Drink little or no intoxicating drinks. Read a few books, but let them be good books, and think a great deal about what you have read. Always be willing to hear the other side, but the other side does not take too much of your time. Never talk too much about yourself, but let whatever you say be clear and to the point. Try to be an organizer rather than an orator—orators were the ruin of every republic and every democracy that ever existed. And whatever you do in regard to organization, try to make it something solid, something lasting. Have the organization rather small and compact than large and incompatible. Instill the love of freedom, the spirit of resistance and the admiration of sacrifice into your comrades.¹⁸

Elsewhere in the *Herald* was a statement that the officers of the party expected "every one of its members [to be] . . . constantly at his post in his Union or society—quiet and not fanatic, but conscious of his purpose and never wavering for one instant in showing his color and standing up for his principles."¹⁹ As political advice and expectations go, these were certainly unique among Milwaukee's parties. But it was the constant reiteration of platitudes, the consistent effort to distribute campaign literature, and a determination to perfect a vote-

⁹*Herald*, January 18, 1902.
¹⁰*Herald*, February 8, 1902.

¹¹*Ibid.*, February 8, 1902.

¹²*Daily News*, January 21, 1902.

¹³See below, pages 47 ff.

¹⁴*Herald*, February 22, 1902.

¹⁵*Herald*, February 22, 1902.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, May 15, 1902.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Journal*, March 15, 1902.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

getting organization which brought an increasing number of adherents to the Social Democrats with each succeeding election.

With the increased momentum of their spring campaign, the Social Democrats made a very creditable showing in the elections of April 1. They more than trebled their vote of the municipal elections of 1900, and almost doubled their gubernatorial total of that year. The entire Social Democratic vote for Tufts and his running mates was over 8,400.²⁰ Every sixth voter in Milwaukee was now a Social Democrat, and the *Herald* expressed the satisfaction of the party in glowing words. At the same time it advised the Socialist Party of America that "The last election in Milwaukee has proved that municipal Socialism as a branch of the Socialist Propaganda in this country has great possibilities and should under no circumstances be underestimated by the comrades in other cities." The cost of this campaign to the Social Democratic party of Milwaukee was \$1,073.90, and its leaders considered this a very small sum considering the magnitude of the campaign.²¹

Soon after the election, the Social Democratic Publishing Company underwent a complete alteration. Following the election edition, Alfred S. Edwards resigned his editorial position on the *Herald* and moved to Chicago. For the next four issues, Frederic Heath and Victor Berger assumed editorial control,²² and on May 10, Mr. Heath was given the directive post. On that day the publishing company announced its reorganization on a more cooperative basis.²³ This followed the issuance of eight thousand dollars worth of stock in small denominations and on liberal terms so that the rank and file of the socialists could become holders of the stock in the company.²⁴

Along with this notification, it was also revealed that Victor Berger had been allowed to relinquish both editorial and financial connections with the paper in order that he might devote more time to his German papers and to the support of his family. As if this were the end of his intimate relation to the paper, a tribute was paid to Berger for his unceasing devotion to socialism:

To Victor L. Berger, more than to any one person, the movement in Milwaukee owes its present vigor, while in the country at large only Eugene V. Debs has accomplished more towards building up a progressive Socialist movement, a fact which may not be generally known.²⁵

The first half of the above statement is an unassailable fact, but a tribute to Berger with the implication that his activity in socialist agitation was to be henceforth curtailed was not apropos. Actually, Victor Berger had not severed relations with the *Herald*. After May 10, he contributed signed articles for the front page of the paper, and to any careful reader, it was evident that the hand and mind of Victor L. Berger were still determining factors in its makeup. Berger's articles henceforth became more and more concerned with national politics and issues, but he still led the thinking of the party on local issues.²⁷

The party's state committee lost no time in preparing for the fall election. As early as May 10, Elizabeth H. Thomas, the state secretary, appealed to Wisconsin Socialists to contribute to the campaign fund.²⁸ The campaign received an impetus in July when Victor Berger and Winfield R. Gaylord, the former preacher of New London, Wisconsin, who was now state organizer of the party, toured the state with a full itinerary from July 14 to July 30, inclusive.²⁹ In order to reach

the voters whom Berger and Gaylord were unable to contact, the state secretary devised a clever scheme. A thousand barbers throughout the state were to receive copies of the *Social Democratic Herald* for six weeks previous to election day.³⁰

Just one month after the Berger-Gaylord tour, two conventions of the Social Democratic party were held in Milwaukee. Both were held in the same hall, the county and congressional convention on the afternoon of August 30, and the state convention that evening. The platform of the county and congressional convention consisted of four brief demands. These were: nationalization of all trusts; national ownership of rail, telegraph, telephone, and steamship lines; a law granting a pension of twelve dollars monthly to every worker over sixty if he earned less than one thousand dollars a year and had been a citizen of the United States for sixteen years; abolition of the United States Senate,³¹ popular election of United States judges, and subjection of all elective officials to the referendum and recall. A complete slate was named during the afternoon for county offices and for the state legislature.³²

Similarly, at the state convention in the evening, an entire party ticket was designated. This time five of the eight candidates chosen for state offices resided outside Milwaukee. The platform adopted by the state convention was the same as previous state platforms, and was comparable to a Milwaukee Social Democratic platform drawn up on state lines.³³

The main item of interest within the party ranks during the campaign was the substitution of a new candidate for governor soon after the convention was nominated. Mathias Bidinger, of Racine, became ill shortly after his nomination, and the campaign committee picked Emil Seidel, of Milwaukee, to run in his place.³⁴ Seidel was a wood carver who had come to Milwaukee from Pennsylvania;³⁵ the nomination for governor was his first step up the political ladder.

As in other campaigns, the Socialists used the argument that principles, not gains, should determine the voters' choice at the polls.³⁶ But their reasoning had not yet penetrated the minds of enough people to elect a Social Democrat to state or county office. Gains again were made, but they would have been greater had not Robert M. La Follette, Sr., stolen the thunder of the Socialists and won many of their votes in the gubernatorial race. It is clear that La Follette won over many Socialists, because Seidel ran as much as twelve hundred votes behind his ticket in Milwaukee county. La Follette's reform platform appealed to many reform-minded persons who voted Social Democratic for other offices. In spite of this, the Social Democrats made decided gains over David Rose, who was the Democratic candidate for governor. La Follette carried the state, but his Milwaukee margin was not exceedingly large. He polled 26,754 ballots in Milwaukee county to 22,334 for Rose and 10,824 for Seidel. Frederic Heath, candidate for county clerk, won close to 12,000 votes.³⁷

The total vote of the Social Democratic party in the state was close to 20,000, and the party officers were well-satisfied with the results of the election. Berger stated that the outcome of the election was especially gratifying because the old party candidates were David S. Rose, the Mayor of Milwaukee, and Robert M. La Follette, both very able politicians. He called La Follette "a half-baked reformer who encountered the animosity of the corporation elements in his party, but by the same token the mistaken sympathy of the working man."³⁸ Obviously, no alliance of socialism and progressivism was in the immediate offing.

²⁰*Sentinel*, April 2, 1902; *Journal*, April 2, 1902.

²¹*Ibid.*, April 26, 1902.

²²*Ibid.*, May 3, 1902.

²³*Ibid.*, May 10, 1902.

²⁴*Ibid.*, April 12 to May 10, 1902.

²⁵*Ibid.*, May 10, 1902.

²⁶*Ibid.*, July 19, 1902.

²⁷*Herald*, April 2, 1902.

²⁸*Ibid.*, May 10, 1902.

²⁹*Ibid.*, May 17, 1902, et seq.

³⁰*Ibid.*, July 26, 1902.

³¹*Herald*, September 6, 1902.

³²*Journal*, November 6, 1902.

³³The Senate was here called, "the bulwark of capitalism and trustocracy."

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, October 11, 1902.

³⁶*Ibid.*, November 1, 1902.

³⁷*Herald*, November 8, 1902.

About this time the reputation of Milwaukee as a graft-free city was receiving some astonishing reverses. Evidences of corruption in the city's government were appearing day after day. As early as 1895, the people of Milwaukee had voted overwhelmingly in favor of municipal ownership of street railways and a light plant.³⁰ The city's administration had repeatedly promised municipal ownership of those utilities, yet it did nothing. As a matter of fact, the administration was proved later to be exceedingly friendly to the privately owned Milwaukee Electric Railway and Light Company. It favored an ordinance in the common council giving the private company a thirty-year extension of its franchise. Although opposition to it was great,³¹ the ordinance ultimately was signed behind the locked doors of the council chamber. The latter precaution was taken because it was feared that an injunction would be served on the mayor by the indignant citizens of Milwaukee.³² An inkling was hereby given to the people of Milwaukee of the disreputable machination going on behind the scenes of their government. Some of them already had become concerned in 1898, when the city exceeded its chartered limit of indebtedness by over fifty-one million dollars.³³

These were just the beginnings of the revelations soon to come before the eyes of the taxpayers. In 1901, there was a scandal connected with the park board. A grand jury was called in that year to investigate this and other ignominies; it returned no indictments, but made the following significant statement:

The grand jury reports no indictments. This, however, is not because there was no evidence brought before it of crimes having been committed, but primarily, because of the present method of selecting grand jurors, and because it requires twelve votes to return a true bill.³⁴

Undoubtedly, there had been shady transactions in an administrative department of the city. The grand jury law was soon changed and became operative in 1904, a fact which meant a great deal in attempting to give Milwaukee a good government.³⁵

But exposure of graft in municipal and county affairs could not wait for the calling of another grand jury in November, 1903.³⁶ Cases involving malappropriation and misuse of funds, favoritism in the granting of contracts and franchises, and downright stealing of public moneys were brought into the open in August of that year. One of the earliest exposures involved the house of correction, which was running at a loss of fifty thousand dollars a year, for some inexplicable reason. Finally, it was proved by the county board of supervisors that the inspector of the institution had contracted to sell chairs manufactured by its inmates at a price way below even the cost of the wood. The inspector had received two sets of bills for the wood, one set with high prices which he charged the county, and the other set with low prices which he paid himself. He pocketed the difference, and the house of correction ran at a deficit each year.³⁷

Other cases involved the aldermen of the city. Some of those gentlemen had been in the habit of granting licenses to illicit gambling houses and taverns for a fee ranging from fifty to five hundred dollars. Others had been engaged in the supposedly more respectable practice of accepting bribes, which averaged

between ten and twenty dollars, from companies who desired side-track privileges without paying the city for a franchise. Throughout the latter part of August and the entire month of September, new disclosures of graft were made through the press.³⁸

An interesting side-note to the graft disclosures was the attitude of the various contemporary newspapers toward the revelations. All, of course, were indignant, and agreed that something had to be done. The *Social Democratic Herald* took delight in pointing out that all the grafters were Republicans and Democrats. It divulged connections of the mayor and the city attorney to the corruption, which some of the other papers omitted. But in the main, the Socialist organ confined itself to blaming the capitalistic system, and not mere individuals for the rotten state of affairs. It maintained that the real grafters, the bribe-givers, were immune to prosecution, and that only the petty bribe-takers would be punished. It pleaded that unless the Social Democratic party were put into office the following spring, the district attorney and the grand jury would fail to do their duty.³⁹

Victor Berger raised the argument that the reason for graft in municipal affairs and its toleration by the people was the capitalist system and prevalence of a "business-man's" ethics:

Public office has become a public graft under the capitalist system. Stealing from the state or the municipality has become so common that it is looked upon with great indulgence by the average citizen. The average business man considers it a semi-legitimate business for the business man in the "business" of politics to make as much out of his investment as he can—and even the American trades-union man, being imbued with the spirit of the business man, or with the grafting instinct of the politician, often shows an appalling leniency towards graft and grafters.

There is only one cure for corruption, that is, Socialism—Socialism that has gone into the flesh and blood of the man. And anyone who wants to abolish corruption entirely, must be in favor of the total abolition of the capitalist system.⁴⁰

The Social Democratic membership and press took up Berger's reasoning and reiterated it whenever they had an opportunity.

The conclusions of the *Milwaukee Journal* regarding the prevalent corruption differed markedly from those of the *Herald*. The *Journal* was a strongly Republican paper in those days, and its concern was centered around the effects of the criminal exposure upon the Republican party. It took for granted the existence of corruption, and surmised that the district attorney would be the leader of the Republican Stalwarts if he uncovered enough evidence.⁴¹ Furthermore, the *Journal* turned on its Democratic opponents. The Democrats were crying "turn the rascals out," in reference to Republicans connected with a post office scandal; the *Journal* replied that the Democrats had better watch out or they would be discovered.⁴²

From the evidence at hand, Milwaukee had joined the ranks of corrupt municipalities. New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, St. Louis, and Minneapolis could boast of another adherent to their way of doing things. In the minds of the citizens of Milwaukee, such a situation had to be remedied. To set the wheels of corruption and retrenchment moving, a number of business men decided to call a great mass meeting for Monday night, September 28. Originally, there were fifty-seven vice-presidents named for the indignation assembly, and no Social Democrats were included.⁴³ However, when final arrangements for the gathering

³⁰*Free Press*, December 26, 1902.

³¹*Sentinel*, December 11, 1899.

³²Daniel W. Hoan, *City Government* (New York, 1936), 39-41. Portions of later confessions of persons involved in the "street car franchise steal" are here quoted.

³³*Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee (1898-1899)*, 4; Laurence M. Lareau, *A Financial and Administrative History of Milwaukee* (Madison, 1908), 154. For an extensive study of the city's finances see Mr. Larson's work.

³⁴Duane Mowry, "The Reign of Graft in Milwaukee" in *Arena*, XXXIV, No. 193 (December, 1903), 580-590.

³⁵*Journal*, August 24, 1903.

³⁶*Sentinel*, November 20, 1903.

³⁷*Journal*, August 15, 21, 22, 26, 28, 1903.

³⁸*Sentinel*, *Journal*, *Herald*, *Daily News*, August and September, 1903.

³⁹*Herald*, August 15 to September 26, 1903.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, August 25, 1903.

⁴¹*Journal*, August 18, 1903.

⁴²*Ibid.*, August 20, 1903.

⁴³*Ibid.*, September 26, 1903.

were made, a total of one hundred and fifty vice-presidents were listed, including a number of Social Democrats.⁸¹

According to the Socialists, indignation meetings merely served as safety valves for the capitalists. Similar meetings had been held in Milwaukee in 1886 and in 1900, but no constructive changes followed them.⁸² Nevertheless, in spite of their antipathy, Social Democrats were placed on the list of honorable vice-presidents for the meeting. This supposedly generous move almost proved the undoing of the mass meeting reformers. For the Socialists saw in the meeting a wonderful opportunity to bring socialist principles before the eyes of the public. The Socialists who had been appointed vice-presidents met to discuss the situation. They decided that all of them except Winfield R. Gaylord, a whirlwind emergency orator, would indignantly decline the honor of being associated with "these half-baked reformers." Gaylord was to accept on condition that he be named one of the speakers at the meeting.⁸³ He was finally so designated, but at a conference of the speakers on Monday morning an attempt was made to limit the type of remarks made by the speakers, and to agree on the adoption of resolutions for the mass meeting. Gaylord refused to agree to these limitations, and appeared on the speakers' platform unshackled by previous agreements, except that he speak no more than ten minutes.⁸⁴

Meanwhile, the other honored Socialists, including Victor Berger, Frederic Heath, W. Bitorious, E. T. Melms, and John Doerfler, submitted a card to the press declining to serve as vice-presidents of the mass meeting and giving their reasons. The card reads as follows:

We . . . hereby decline to serve as vice presidents for the so-called indignation meeting to be held tonight at the West Side Turner hall.

Our reasons for doing so are the following:

1. Most of the vice presidents appointed for the occasion are the very men who have practically ruled our city until today, and are responsible for the sea of corruption in our city and county government.

2. Some of the vice presidents for the indignation meeting tonight, while they are prominent business men, are suspected of being notorious bribe givers, or their attorneys, and have good reasons to fear a grand jury investigation.

3. In order to stop corruption in our city and county governments, we must have a complete change of system, and apply entirely new principles. The "business man's" principles, according to which everything is for sale, including honor and duty, must be eliminated from our political life, to make room for the modern workingman's principle: "Do your duty and get the just value thereof."⁸⁵

Although the leaders of the Social Democratic party declined to be vice-presidents of the gathering, they advised all their followers to be present.⁸⁶

Officially, the meeting was held under the sponsorship of the Milwaukee Turnverein. Aside from Gaylord, the speakers were General F. C. Winkler, a corporation attorney; Captain I. M. Bean, an iron mine president; Otto Dorn, a young lawyer and politician; and T. C. Boggs, an insurance manager.⁸⁷ It was to open at eight o'clock, but every chair on the floor was taken before seven-thirty. The hall was packed from the stage to the door and more than a thousand stood on the sides and at the rear of the hall.⁸⁸ The estimated attendance was four thousand.⁸⁹

Surprisingly, all the Milwaukee papers paid more attention to Gaylord's speech than to those of the other men on the platform. The other speakers contented themselves with uttering a series of meaningless statements. Gaylord, on the other hand, made some obvious insinuations against some of the vice-presidents of the meeting, and provoked a great deal of response from the audience.⁹⁰ He first attacked the graft among Milwaukee's officials, and the futility of previous indignation meetings. Then he pointed out that the list of vice-presidents of the meeting included: officers of corporations who had "bought up" aldermen, rather than pay for franchises; attorneys for the railways; former office holders, who had been victims of the war cry "turn out the rascals;" and others of their class. He concluded that the cause of political corruption was business corruption, and that the ethics of business had to be replaced by the ethics of socialism if graft was to be abolished.⁹¹

After the prepared speeches were given, the meeting was thrown open to the floor, and a number of men gave short talks.⁹² The Socialists in the audience made repeated calls for Victor Berger to mount the rostrum. He complied with a short speech. His remarks began by blaming the condition of graft and corruption in Milwaukee upon the capitalist system, rather than the individuals involved, but his most important statement was the following:

The average citizen has a short memory. An indignation meeting like this will bring in three or four thousand people; but when it comes to election day it is all forgotten again. A good many of you gentlemen will vote for the very men that you condemn today; and a good many politicians will count on that.⁹³

In closing, Berger advised the voters to make the next election day their real indignation meeting.

While the discussion was going on, the resolutions committee was having a struggle trying to stop the one Socialist member, Frederic Heath, from bringing in a minority report. A majority report of five resolutions was read to the mass meeting by F. A. Wadhams, president of the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association of Milwaukee. Those resolutions strongly condemned corruption in city and county offices, and stated that the prosecutors of the county were expected to furnish the guilty, and that the assembled people would support that government as far as possible. The final resolution called for a committee of ten, to be appointed by the chairman of the meeting, whose duty would be to assist the public prosecutor, and to report on its accomplishments at some future public meeting.⁹⁴

As Wadhams concluded, Heath, the editor of the *Social Democratic Herald*, immediately stepped to the front and proceeded to read the report of the minority of the committee, which consisted of himself. That report follows:

Whereas, This corruption in our city and county government is nothing new, but has been growing for many years, and its outcroppings have often aroused public indignation,⁹⁵

Whereas, This corruption will continue to grow as long as the capitalist system and its methods shall continue to rule our public life; and,

Whereas, No amount of punishment will deter greedy hoodlars nor can any reform business administration give us an assurance against future corruption so long as the principles of government are not changed; and,

Whereas, It is a well known fact that the very capitalists and business men who are looked upon as the standard bearers of public honesty and public morality are also the very

⁸¹*Journal*, September 28, 1903.

⁸²*Herald*, October 3, 1903.

⁸³*History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victory*, 48.

⁸⁴*Journal*, September 28, 1903.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷*Sentinel*, September 29, 1903; *Herald*, October 3, 1903.

⁸⁸*Herald*, October 3, 1903.

⁸⁹*Journal*, September 29, 1903.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹*Herald*, October 3, 1903.

⁹²*Journal*, September 29, 1903.

⁹³*Herald*, October 3, 1903.

⁹⁴*Journal*, September 29, 1903.

men who directly or indirectly buy up and corrupt the business men elected to public office; therefore, be it

Resolved, That it is the sense of this meeting that the only way to cure the corruption in our city and county government is to change its methods and principles and take the reins of the city and county away from the capitalist class, its agents and attorneys, and put into the hands of the working class, with the understanding that they are to apply the principles of Socialism to our government.⁶⁷

As soon as Heath finished reading his report, E. H. Rooney, a prominent Socialist, sprang to his feet and moved the substitution of the minority for the majority report. An argument resulted over this motion, the opponents of socialism protesting against turning the indignation meeting into a political demonstration. The Socialists answered by contending that their movement was much more than merely political.⁶⁸

At any rate, an oral vote was taken to decide which set of resolutions would be adopted, and the chairman of the meeting ruled that the majority resolutions had won the vote. The *Journal* stated that Victor Berger agreed with the ruling of the chairman,⁶⁹ but Berger later said that there was a real question as to which set of resolutions received the loudest vote of approval. Socialists generally maintained that they were in the majority at the assembly.⁷⁰

Both the *Sentinel* and the *Journal* argued that the Social Democrats had attempted to capture the meeting and turn it into a Socialist rally, but had been decidedly repulsed.⁷¹ The Socialists denied these accusations;⁷² but the truth appears to be that they not only attempted to capture the meeting, but also succeeded to a good measure in that endeavor. Indeed, the meeting had emphasized socialist ideas more than any others, and a set of socialist resolutions missed adoption by a hair.

The Socialists refused to accept a place on the committee of ten which was appointed to smell out corruption and help purify Milwaukee city and county government. Their reasons were simple. They believed that the committee was useless and that nothing constructive would be done by it. Further, they predicted that the main work of the committee would be to find bribe-takers and that the biggest offenders, the bribe-givers, would go free. Finally, the Socialists maintained that they did not want to be compromised by being associated with men whose reputations were tainted by their political and financial connections.⁷³

Following the indignation meeting, the amount of corruption uncovered suddenly increased. The district attorney's office and the county board of supervisors held a great many investigations and inquiries, the results of which appeared in all the papers; for they were anxious to show the public how much they were doing to clean up Milwaukee's political mess.⁷⁴

In December, 1903, the grand jury investigation began, and throughout the winter months, indictments were turned in by the jury. Although much of their work remained secret, enough appeared in the newspapers to open wide the eyes of Milwaukee's citizenry.⁷⁵ Throughout these investigations the Socialists bemoaned the fact that the bribers went free, while their pawns were prosecuted. Some of the most eminent men of the city admitted giving bribes to aldermen and others for certain privileges, but for turning in this evidence, they were given immunity from punishment.⁷⁶

The numerous exposures of Republicans and Democratic officials naturally benefited the Social Democratic party. The revelations of corruption in the municipal government determined a sizeable number of voters to forsake the older parties and vote the Socialist ticket in the next election. There was a general feeling among politicians at the city hall that the Social Democrats would receive a large vote at the spring election, and that they might elect their entire ticket. With this in mind, both the Republicans and the Democrats were busy combating restive factions of their parties.⁷⁷ Already in August, 1903, Berger spoke of the additions to Socialist ranks, but did not welcome it. He felt that the disclosures of public graft would drive many voters to the Social Democratic party who were not really socialists. And he doubted whether a victorious Socialist party would be able to accomplish anything midst a sea of corruption. In fact, he openly questioned whether it might not be advisable to let the capitalist parties ride for a time and thereby make socialism a necessity. However, despite this problem, Berger concluded that in another ten years a similar state of corruption might exist if his party did not gain control. Consequently, the Socialists were to spare no effort in trying to educate in socialism any dissatisfied elements of the other parties, but to close their ranks to mere politicians who would join the organization for political remuneration.⁷⁸

The campaign for the spring election of 1904 had unofficially begun during the disclosures of 1903. Each party endeavored to prove to the people of Milwaukee that it was interested in honest municipal government. The Republican *Journal* stated that, "The way to purify the administration in the city and county is to put able and square business men in office."⁷⁹ But the *Herald*, through Victor Berger, opposed that reasoning by writing:

We again want to warn our readers not to be caught by the current drivél about "business methods" and "business principles." A government is not a personal contrivance like a business. It should not be administered from a point of view of economy as business men understand the term. It should bring about the greatest good to all regardless of expense, as long as there is a way to make ends meet.⁸⁰

The Socialists believed that their former charges against the old parties had been adequately proved in the graft investigations, and that no new accusations were necessary for the coming campaign. The party central committee announced the convention of the party for February 27, and declared that municipal ownership was still their primary plank in beginning the struggle for complete emancipation of the people from the influence of capitalist industry.⁸¹

Berger's earlier hesitant attitude regarding a Social-Democratic victory at the polls brought forth some articles in the opposition press that the Socialists wanted only legislative, and not administrative positions. But the *Herald* was quick to deny such accusations, and asserted that its party needed a complete victory in order to clean house.⁸² There was general accord in Milwaukee that the Socialists would elect a few aldermen; the growth of the party in the tenth, eleventh,

⁶⁷The Milwaukee Germania Abendpost, September 22, 1903.

⁶⁸Herald, August 29, 1903.

⁶⁹Journal, September 30, 1903.

⁷⁰Herald, January 2, 1904.

⁷¹The Social Democratic Herald (Milwaukee), January 30, 1904. After this issue of the Herald, the words Social and Democratic were connected by a hyphen, both in the title of the paper and in all references to the party. On this date the convention of the "Social Democratic" party was announced, while in the February 6 edition mention was made of the "Social-Democratic" party. No reason was given in either of the above issues for the addition of the hyphen. Henceforth, all references will be to the Social-Democratic party. The party was the same as previous to February 6, and the party's newspaper embodied no other changes in its make-up. On May 2, 1903, it had been enlarged to a six-page seven-column paper, and it maintained that enlarged form. Mr. Frederic Heath, who was editor of the paper at the time, said in an interview with the author on July 21, 1942, that the hyphen was added to de-emphasize the word "social."

⁷²The Social-Democratic Herald (Milwaukee), February 13, 1904. Hereafter, for purposes of convenience, the abbreviated form, Herald, will again be used in footnote references.

⁷³Herald, October 3, 1903.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Journal, September 29, 1903.

⁷⁶Herald, October 3, 1903.

⁷⁷Sentinel, September 29, 1903; Journal, September 29, 1903.

⁷⁸Herald, October 3, 1903.

⁷⁹Ibid., October 24, 1903.

⁸⁰Sentinel, Journal, Herald, Daily News, September 29, 1903, to March 30, 1904.

⁸¹Ibid., December, 1903, to March, 1904.

⁸²Herald, November 28, December 12 and 19, 1903.

twentieth, and twenty-first wards had been so great that some of the Republican and Democratic members of the common council in those wards admitted impending defeat in their fight for re-election.⁸³

As scheduled, the city convention of the Social-Democratic party was held on February 27, 1904. All the local newspapers, except the Democratic *Sentinel*, carried extensive accounts of the convention. The platform of the party was virtually the same as in previous years. The only noteworthy changes were in the preamble, which called attention to the corruption, the work of the grand jury, and to the fact that a municipal victory would not mean socialism, but only a step in that direction. A complete ticket was chosen for county and municipal offices: Victor Berger was nominated for mayor; Jacob Hunger, for treasurer, and William Arnold, for comptroller.⁸⁴

The fact that Berger was nominated demonstrated that the appeal of the campaign would be to old and new socialists, and not to the ephemeral reformers brought into being by the grand jury investigations. The *Journal* carried a complimentary sketch of Berger a few days after the Socialist convention, and quoted some of his acceptance statements, which were singularly lacking in campaign promises:

It makes no difference to us whether we win or lose in Milwaukee. We are fighting a bigger fight than for a political victory in this city. If we are defeated, we will be here again next year, and the year after, and every year until we succeed.

That you want no votes that are not Social-Democratic votes is evidenced by the fact that you have nominated Victor L. Berger for office to head your ticket. That is not a vote-catching undertaking.⁸⁵

The campaign was carried out along several interesting lines. Almost the first campaign speeches were given before a meeting of the Federated Trades Council. On March second, Berger and Arnold addressed the Council, not as union men but as candidates of the Social-Democratic party.⁸⁶ Generally, the Socialist campaign was carried along the pattern indicated by the platform, and no new vote-catching arguments were used. An experiment was successfully carried out by the *Journal* to bring the thoughts of the three opposing parties to its readers. In every issue from March 11 through April 4, a half-page of the paper was devoted to the Republican, Democratic, and Social-Democratic parties. This was the first such experiment by a Milwaukee paper, and on the Monday before election, the editors of all three columns were generous in their commendation of the paper. The *Journal* was a Republican paper and was outspoken against Mayor Rose. For this very reason, Rose refused to appoint a man to edit the Democratic column; but the *Journal* chose a great writer, William F. Hooker, and paid him to edit the space devoted to the Democratic party. Hooker actually produced some of the best articles and slogans of the campaign, among which was "Who is the Guy?"⁸⁷

In his campaign for re-election, Rose began by attacking Guy D. Goff, the Republican candidate, but soon switched to the Social Democratic choice. He made statements that the real dispute was not between Goff and himself, and that he would resign in favor of Goff if a division of the capitalist vote meant the election of Berger.⁸⁸ Rose had a great ally in the Catholic Church. Archbishop Sebastian Mersmer forbade Catholics to vote the Social-Democratic ticket or belong to that party.⁸⁹ Father Thomas F. Sherman delivered constant tirades

against the Socialists. In a speech in January, he ridiculed socialism, calling eight-tenths of all socialists "atheists and therefore beasts."⁹⁰ The Polish priests went so far as to invite Rose to their parishes the Sunday before election, and to arrange staggered meetings for him so he could visit all the churches and speak against socialism.⁹¹

Still, the Social-Democratic party pushed forward its work. Contributions for the campaign fund came in small amounts from Maine, Montana, Florida, Massachusetts, Illinois, and elsewhere. Through the columns of the *Herald*, Socialists all over the country were made to feel that the Milwaukee campaign was part of one fight toward bigger things.⁹² Socialist literature in seven different languages was distributed in every house of the city, together with thousands of copies of the *Herald* and *Vorwaerts*, with the express purpose of educating the people on municipal socialism. Usually, this material was distributed very early on Sunday morning, and every possible home was reached. Expenses for the printed material were met by the ward branches, by donations, and by a punch-card scheme. Posters were scattered over the city with the slogan, "Milwaukee needs a Social-Labor Housecleaning," and the column in the *Milwaukee Journal* helped a great deal.

The Social-Democrats were instructed to put as much socialism as possible into the heads of those who were going to vote Socialist merely to get honest men into office, and have a change in regime. A real effort was made by the party's national committee to cooperate by sending speakers to Milwaukee.⁹³ Eugene Debs again highlighted the campaign by speaking at a great rally the Friday before election.⁹⁴

As a result of their strenuous campaign, and the gaining of new adherents from anti-graft groups, the Social-Democrats once more nearly doubled their previous municipal vote. But this time they also tasted some of the fruits of victory for the first time! Nine aldermen, four county supervisors, two justices of the peace, and two constables were elected under the Social-Democratic banner. The ninth, tenth, eleventh, twentieth, twenty-first, and twenty-second wards proved to be real strongholds of the party. Heath, Seidel, Melms, and six others were elected as the first Socialist aldermen in the city.⁹⁵

Victor Berger polled over 15,300 votes for mayor out of a total of about 60,000. David Rose was re-elected with over 23,500 votes, and Guy D. Goff, the Republican candidate, ran second with about 17,600 ballots. In reality, Berger should have run right behind Rose, for over 3,600 votes were cast for the S. L. P. candidate and most of those were unquestionably meant for Berger. Every local newspaper agreed that at least three thousand of the S. L. P. vote was meant for the Social-Democratic candidate. The S. L. P. choice had been nominated by petition, and his party had distributed no literature and held no campaign meetings; yet, it showed an official gain of over three thousand votes. There was no doubt that voters, unacquainted with the operation of the voting machines, confused the Socialist Labor party with the Social-Democratic party. This was especially possible since the S. L. P. lever was immediately below that of the Social-Democratic party, and the booths were poorly lighted.⁹⁶

The *Sentinel* hailed the results of the election as a defeat for the Social-Democrats,⁹⁷ but the *Daily News* called it a great victory for them, and lauded

⁸³*Journal*, February 27, 1904.

⁸⁴*Herald*, March 5, 1904.

⁸⁵*Journal*, March 1, 1904.

⁸⁶Minutes of the Federated Trades Council, March 2, 1904.

⁸⁷*Journal*, April 4, 1904.

⁸⁸*Herald*, April 16, 1904.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰*Journal*, January 22, 1904.

⁹¹*Herald*, April 16, 1904.

⁹²*Ibid.*, March 19, 1904.

⁹³*Ibid.*, March 26 and April 9, 1904.

⁹⁴*Journal*, April 2, 1904.

⁹⁵*Daily News* and *Journal*, April 6, 1904; *Herald*, April 9, 1904.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*

⁹⁷*Sentinel*, April 6 and 7, 1904.

their campaign methods. Coming from a non-Socialist paper, the following comment on the Socialist vote was a fine compliment:

... This is no small achievement for a new party, which has depended for its growth entirely upon conversion of voters to its principles and has eschewed the customary method of campaigning. It "treated" no voters. It corrupted no elector. It asked no voter to support its candidates that did not believe in the principles of the party. In fact, its candidates announced that they did not want the protest vote of Republicans or Democrats. They wanted to convert the voters to Socialism more than they wanted to get the office for themselves.

In view of the great gains that have been made by the party and its representation on the common council and county board, which will give the party opportunity to push its projects for municipal Socialism and emphasize them, the Social-Democrats have every reason to consider their defeat a splendid victory. Another such defeat and the Social-Democrats will have control of every branch of municipal government.¹⁰

The *Herald* was not slow to express its satisfaction over the results of the election. However, most Social-Democrats were indignant over the S. L. P. vote. They felt that they might have elected several more aldermen, if the vote, rightfully theirs, had been registered correctly. They accused election booth inspectors of pulling the wrong lever for unsuspecting voters, and of using every possible means to dissuade people from voting the Social-Democratic ticket.¹¹

But this was the last time the Socialist Labor party proved meddlesome to the Social-Democrats, and the faithful members of the Social-Democratic party were finally repaid in a measure, by having some of their candidates elected to public office. This was the first political victory of the Social-Democratic party.

¹⁰*Daily News*, April 6, 1904.

¹¹*Herald*, April 9, 1904.

CHAPTER V

FOUR YEARS OF INTRENCHMENT

AFTER THE VICTORIES of the spring of 1904, the Social-Democrats of Milwaukee embarked on the task of conquering the electorate with a new confidence. They expected to elect a number of men to the state legislature in the fall election, and to poll a great vote for the Socialist party candidate for president of the United States.

The Milwaukee Socialists had repeatedly pronounced their independence from the Socialist party of America in all local matters.¹ They referred to the state autonomy provision in the Socialist party unity constitution of 1901, to answer the attempts at interference by outsiders in intra-Wisconsin tactics.² Yet, when a national campaign was in progress, they joined with all their strength and enthusiasm, in order to make it a success.

Milwaukee sent a formidable delegation to the national convention of the Socialist party in May, 1904. Victor Berger, as usual, headed the group, and lost no time in insisting that it was constructive work, not talk that was needed. He was the outstanding proponent of retaining a set of immediate demands in the platform, and of barring impossibilism from the convention.³ He succeeded to a degree, but in general, Milwaukeeans thought that the platform which was finally drawn up read too much like an essay. They believed in appealing to the workman in a simple language, and described the new platform as having "the odor of an academic workshop." As a matter of fact, George D. Herron, the Iowa professor, had composed the platform, although most of the Social-Democrats of Milwaukee felt that Eugene Debs would have done a much better job, with the direct and simple manner of composition.⁴ Nevertheless, those men were determined to see that Debs, the Socialist nominee for president, polled a large vote in the Milwaukee area.

They also desired to make a good showing in the vote for state and congressional offices, and with this in mind, nominated outstanding party men for the various positions. At the state convention, which was held in Milwaukee on September 3, 1904, William A. Arnold was named as the party's choice for governor, and Victor Berger and Winfield Gaylord were nominated for congress in the fourth and fifth Wisconsin congressional districts. The platform adopted at the convention was again similar to those of previous years, but was more extensive.⁵ The Milwaukee campaign was a strenuous one, and was climaxed by the appearance of Debs in two mammoth gatherings, the week before the election.⁶

Mayor Rose's Democratic party machine conducted a pre-election poll of Milwaukee county voters, and concluded that the Socialists would poll twenty thousand votes in the November election.⁷ Their estimate was remarkably accurate in the presidential race. Debs received about that number of votes; indeed, he won two thousand more in the county than Judge Alton Brooks Parker, the Democratic presidential nominee.

However, the Social-Democratic candidate for governor, William A. Arnold, ran behind his ticket in every ward of the city. The *Journal* again attributed this heavy Socialist support of La Follette, for Arnold lost votes even in the dis-

¹*Herald*, March 1 and February 15, 1902, February 14 and June 20, 1903.

²*Ibid.*, March 1, 1902. The state autonomy provision was included in section four, article six, of that constitution.

³*Ibid.*, April 30, 1904.

⁴*Ibid.*, May 14, 1904.

⁵*Ibid.*, September 20, 1904.

⁶*Ibid.*, November 5, 1904.

⁷*Free Press*, October 20, 1904.

tricts which were Socialist strongholds.⁸ Yet, there was consolation in the showing of Berger and Gaylord, both of whom increased the Socialist vote by two thousand in these districts. Berger ran ahead of his Democratic opponent, but behind the Republican, William Stafford.

Following the precedent of the April election, the November election was not devoid of Social-Democratic victories. Five Social-Democrats were elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly, and one to the State Senate. All of these men were trade-unionists. Jacob Rummel, the new state senator, was the foreman in a cigar factory. Among the new assemblymen were Frederick Brockhausen, a cigar-maker, and the secretary of the Wisconsin State Federation of Labor; Edmund J. Berner, also a cigar-maker; William Alldridge, a machinist; Herman Hansen, a tanner, and an officer in his union; August Strehlow, a painter.⁹ These men were the first Social-Democrats in Wisconsin to hold seats in the state legislature. They were destined to do good work for their party, and for the working class; in fact, their presence was felt from the moment of their appearance in the state capitol.¹⁰

Early in 1905, an incident occurred which cast a cloud over the Socialist victories of 1904 in Milwaukee. An announcement emanated from party headquarters that there would be no Social-Democratic candidate in the county judicial election of 1905.¹¹ Victor Berger followed up that declaration by a statement in his paper, the *Wahrheit*, that Socialists should vote against Judge Paul D. Carpenter, because he had delivered numerous anti-socialist speeches, and because he was a tool of the Roman Catholic Church which had "thrown down the gauntlet" to the Social Democratic party. The statement from headquarters coupled with Berger's editorial utterance, was interpreted by some persons to mean that Berger and his cohorts were favoring a capitalist party, and were dictating to members of the Social-Democratic party.¹²

The resignations of several members of the party in Milwaukee resulted.¹³ Finally, protests from officers of the Socialist party outside Milwaukee, especially William Trautmann, of Cincinnati, led to Berger's removal from the national executive committee of the party. The city central committee offered an explanation of the entire affair. It stated that a referendum had resulted in a four to one vote against entering the judicial race. The reasons for this result were varied: there was still a debt of sixteen hundred dollars, dating from the elections of 1904; there were few lawyers in the party, and no suitable one available for the position; after two difficult campaigns, the members could not endure another one so soon; the party had gained so many votes in the past two years that it was necessary to have a short rest from political battles in order to improve the organization and deepen the socialistic understanding of the voters; the party could not risk a superficial campaign without losing a great deal of prestige and a sizeable vote, both of which would be a blow to the entire national movement.¹⁴

In reply to charges that he was favoring a particular party or candidate, Berger pointed out that there were eight or nine contestants for the judicial office, and that he had merely advised against voting for the one who, in his eyes, had been most obnoxious to the cause of socialism. Furthermore, Berger cited the state autonomy provision of the national Socialist constitution, and denied that he had committed any deed which was opposed to the interests or dictates of the Socialist party of America.¹⁵

In spite of all these arguments, charges continued to come from persons who seemed determined to discredit Berger. His sublime egotism¹⁶ had undoubtedly antagonized some Socialists who did not hold his views on tactics.¹⁷ Eugene Debs defended Berger,¹⁸ but ultimately, the Social-Democratic party of Wisconsin had to accept a charter from the national executive committee.¹⁹ The matter was not entirely cleared up to the satisfaction of Milwaukee Social-Democrats until Berger was again elected to the national executive committee in February, 1907.²⁰

Meanwhile, intra-Socialist disagreements did not stop the city organizer of the party, Edmund T. Melms, from getting the fight for the municipal election of 1906 underway. Immediately after the election of November, 1904, he had written an open letter to the branches of the party in the city and county, saying, "The battle for 1906 has begun." He wrote of the necessity of a larger membership, and especially stressed the fact that a much greater number of the members had to do active work for the party.²¹

Melms hammered away at organization within the party, week after week. He stressed branch meetings, the paying of dues, getting subscriptions to the *Herald*, perfecting organization, holding picnics, parties, etc.; and his work showed results. His attempts at making every member of the Social-Democratic party in Milwaukee a party worker, were successful to a great degree.²²

The greatest innovation for which Melms was responsible, was the holding of a mammoth Socialist carnival every winter. The first such affair was held in February, 1902, and each one thereafter became more successful in popular appeal, as well as in financial benefit to the Social-Democratic party. The Federated Trades Council cooperated in these carnivals,²³ and a definite appeal was made to women interested in socialism by having them help in the preparations.²⁴ These carnivals were held at the Freie Gemeinde hall, the Hippodrome, the Exposition building, and later at the Auditorium. They popularized the Socialist party immeasurably, and by depicting the Democratic and Republican parties in a humorously bad light, they infinitely aided in furthering party propaganda.

The Socialist carnival of 1905 drew an attendance of twelve thousand, thus enabling the party to wipe out a heavy party debt, and start a new campaign of agitation and education.²⁵ Later festivals were even more successful.

However, the serious sides of campaigns were not neglected in the interests of carnivals. Already in November, 1905, Victor Berger was requesting fifty citizens for each electoral district to be armed and on watch at the ballot box to prevent any tampering with the vote.²⁶ In the same month the *Herald* warned its opponents against attempting to steal the election, by stating that it would have armed vigilance committees in each district.²⁷

A group of prominent business men in Milwaukee organized a Voters' League for the ensuing election of April, 1906, for the expressed purpose of ensuring the choice of honest candidates by the voters, without reference to party. The Socialists scoffed at this organization, even though it suggested a few of their candidates as being the best-suited for certain offices. They felt that the men who composed the Voters' League were themselves responsible for some of the corruption in Milwaukee's government, and that they were merely clouding the issue between socialism and capitalism.²⁸

⁸Morris Hillquit, *Loose Leaves From a Busy Life* (New York, 1934), 53.

⁹*Journal*, April 14, 1905.

¹⁰*Herald*, July 2, 1905.

¹¹*Ibid.*, October 7, 1905.

¹²*Ibid.*, February 2, 1907.

¹³*Ibid.*, November 19, 1904.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, June 10, 24, July 22, 1905.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, February 15, 1902.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, January 11, 1902.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, February 2, 1905.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, November 11, 1905.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, November 25, 1905.

²⁰*Journal*, April 2, 1906.

¹*Journal*, November 9, 1904.

²*Herald*, November 12, 1904.

³*Ibid.*, January 28, 1905.

⁴*Free Press*, March 29, 1905.

⁵*Herald*, April 8, 1905.

⁶*Free Press*, March 29, 1905.

⁷*Herald*, April 8, 1905.

⁸*Ibid.*

While furthering the campaign, the Social-Democratic Publishing Company had also been conducting a campaign of its own to raise funds for a printing plant. The *Herald* had been printed under contract ever since its removal to Milwaukee; but on January 13, 1906, after months of ceaseless effort in raising money, an issue of the *Herald* appeared, which had been completely printed by the Social-Democratic Publishing Company. The party now had its own paper, printed with aid of its own linotype machine on its own printing press.²⁹ A first step had been taken to ensure the organization that its literature would be spread in a more efficient and inexpensive manner.

The Milwaukee Social-Democrats had attempted to uphold a realistic attitude and platform. Yet they were considered fanatics, visionaries, utopians, and a great many other things by numerous business and professional men of the city.³⁰ After the elections of 1904, the Socialists saw that they had a real chance of carrying the city. With this in mind, they decided to make themselves more acceptable to the business and professional men who were smarting under Republican and Democratic misrule. They set aside the plank in their platform which required that in the future no franchises should be granted to private public utility corporations, and adopted one demanding special guarantees from corporations applying for city franchises.

Until January, 1906, it had been an axiom among the Social-Democrats in Milwaukee to stand firmly against selling, leasing, or giving away of franchises for public utilities. Their aldermen had voted en bloc against any franchise submitted to the common council. Unfortunately, their policy aided the monopolies of the existing railroad and street railway companies which already had access to the city.

The city was in need of better suburban service, yet the Socialist aldermen could not, according to their platform, vote for franchises to any of the companies bidding for control of the added facilities, even if the franchises were favorable to the city. Victor L. Berger, as was his custom, sounded the alarm for the Social-Democrats to take cognizance of the realities of administration and the needs of Milwaukee's citizenry. He stated that if the Social-Democrats were elected in April, their hands would be tied by their own platform, and they would be able to do nothing to help give the people of Milwaukee better street car and railroad service. He said: "If we carry Milwaukee next spring, we cannot tell the citizens that they must wait for additional street car or railroad facilities until the Co-Operative Commonwealth is established."³¹

The laws of Wisconsin, and the finances of Milwaukee prohibited municipal ownership of those lines in the near future, hence there was no reason to tie the hands of Socialist aldermen in franchise matters. With the possibility of the Social-Democracy being victorious at the next election, it was imperative that its purely critical and negative position become more positive and constructive. Furthermore, as its membership had become larger and its voting constituency greater, the Social-Democracy was gradually appealing to a wider and more bourgeois element of the city. Consequently, a change in the public utility plank of their platform was necessary, even though that plank had embraced the more emphasized of all Social-Democratic tenets.

²⁹*Herald*, January 13, 1906.

³⁰Conversation of author with George Lounsbury on December 26, 1911. Mr. Lounsbury is a former editor of the *Sentinel*, and was active in what he calls Tory circles during the rise of Milwaukee Socialism.

³¹*Herald*, January 27, 1906.

Bearing these conditions in mind, Victor Berger published five conditions under which he believed franchises could be granted fairly to private companies. He suggested that the platform of his party be changed, so that under certain circumstances the Social-Democrats in the common council and the county board should have the right to vote for a favorable franchise. His advice was purposely placed on the day the city convention of the party was to take place.³²

That convention was called for Saturday, January 27, 1906, for the sole purpose of discussing and adopting a platform. The platform ultimately adopted embodied one very important change. Berger's advice was heeded; and the five conditions he had suggested, under which franchises could be granted, were taken verbatim from his newspaper editorial and included in demand number one of the platform. Statements were added by the convention concerning the equipment of the telephone company. As modified the demand appeared as follows:

That the city secure the ownership and management of all public service enterprises as far and as fast as the state laws will allow. And where such ownership and management is at the time being impossible, we demand that no franchise be granted to any street or railway companies, except upon the following conditions, viz.:

a. That the entire property is to revert to the city without any compensation at the end of a specified period, or that the city shall have the right to take over at the actual time that part of the street railway, trackage and rolling stock or the equipment of the telephone company that is necessary for the operation of the same, within the city or county limits at any time when the city or county gets the power to buy, own and operate such lines and to issue the necessary bonds for that purpose.

b. That a guarantee be given that rolling stock and the trackage, or the wiring and other equipment be kept in good condition. Furthermore, no overcrowding of the cars shall be allowed.

c. That the city get a certain yearly revenue from the company for the franchise while it is in operation.

d. That the eight-hour day shall be observed by the company in the operation of all lines, and the trade unions be recognized.

e. That every franchise approved by the city council or the county board must have the endorsement of a public referendum before it shall go into effect.³³

Soon after the new plank was announced, a railroad franchise was brought to the council for consideration. An attempt was made to rush the franchise through with a superficial examination, but the Socialist aldermen succeeded in holding the decision over until the next meeting of the council.³⁴ A week later the franchise of the Chicago and Milwaukee Electric Railroad Company was passed under suspension of the rules. All the conditions which the Socialists wanted to add to the franchise were omitted; hence, they voted against it. However, provisions were agreed upon, which limited fares, and allowed the city to purchase the road at any time.³⁵

About a week after their new platform was presented to the public, the party ticket was announced. The city candidates, chosen by a party referendum, consisted of William A. Arnold, for mayor; Harry E. Briggs, for comptroller; Cook Hunger, for treasurer; and William F. Thiel, for city attorney.³⁶ Thiel was a former instructor of constitutional law at Oshkosh Normal School, and a great deal was expected of him in this and the following campaigns.³⁷ Heath and Seidel had been mentioned as possible mayoralty candidates, but it was decided that they should run for the common council again.³⁸

³²*Ibid.* ³³*Ibid.*, February 2, 1906.

³⁴*Proceedings of the Common Council* (1905-1906), 1245.

³⁵*Journal*, February 5, 1906.

³⁶*Herald*, February 10, 1906.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 1271-1278.

³⁸*Journal*, January 27, 1906.

The first meeting of the campaign was held at the South Side Armory, its largest hall in the city, on February 26.³⁸ In 1906 a primary election was held for municipal offices, for the first time. The primary meant little to the Socialists, since their candidates were all chosen by party referendum, and they entered only one name on the ballot for each office. Because there was no contest within the party, Arnold polled only some four thousand votes in the primary.³⁹

Just after the election of 1904, when the Socialists had placed their first men in office, a prediction was made by one of the capitalist papers that, "The Socialists through their adherence to principles and their insistence upon the inviolability of party pledges will serve to elevate the standard of politics."⁴⁰ Two years later another paper carried the sequel to that prediction in an editorial which foreshadowed an increased Socialist aldermanic vote. The editorial read: "The Social Democrats have brought to the Common Council a spirit of honesty and independence that was needed and that has helped to bring that body into better public repute."⁴¹

With that reputation, the Socialists added five new aldermen in 1906. These included Robert Buech, Max A. Grass, Bernhard Boemke, Henry Ries, and August Strehlow. However, the Socialist vote in the tenth ward slid backwards and Frederic Heath and Albert Welch failed in their quest for re-election,⁴² probably because of their uncompromisingly anti-capitalist attitude in the common council.⁴³ The outcome was that the Socialists now had twelve aldermen in office out of a total of forty-six. They also elected five county supervisors, two justices and three constables.⁴⁴

The mayoralty race produced an upset in this year. David Rose, the perennial incumbent, was defeated by a young man of twenty-nine, wealthy Sherburne Becker. Becker received close to 23,000 votes to 21,200 for Rose, and 16,837 for Arnold, the Social-Democratic nominee. The *Journal* maintained that the election showed an actual loss to the Social-Democrats, since the combined S. L. P. and Social-Democratic vote in 1904 had been close to nineteen thousand, and there was no question that most of the S. L. P. vote in that year had been meant for Berger. Indeed, William Arnold said after the election that he was disappointed at the Social-Democratic showing, and had expected a much greater vote.⁴⁵

On the other hand, Berger reasoned that the party had done very well and had shown a substantial increase over the last election. He admitted to claiming most of the S. L. P. vote in 1904, but argued that most of those ballots had been merely protest votes of Republicans and Democrats after the graft disclosure. True Social-Democrats, he said, would have known better than to pull the wrong lever.⁴⁶ At any rate, the increased number of aldermen and supervisors gave the Socialists an actual, if not a paper, gain.

With the increased representation they had acquired in common council, the party turned immediately to the question of the fall campaign. The state convention was held on June 2, and the platform adopted included a change in the franchise plank, which coincided with the position of the Milwaukee section. No city in Wisconsin was to lease, sell, or give away a public franchise "where it can be avoided." Conservation, reforestation, and national life insurance were also emphasized. In order to propagandize this platform, Winfield R. Gaylord was chosen as Social-Democratic candidate for governor.⁴⁷ But the candidates for

the assembly and for Milwaukee county offices were not announced until September 1. William F. Thiel carried the banner as nominee for district attorney, a highly coveted post since the beginning of the graft investigations.⁴⁸

The campaign was carried out with even more vigor than usual. Literature was spread early, and more speeches than ever were made in all sections of the city and state.⁴⁹ Enthusiasm was worked up to a higher pitch than in the spring election, for the Socialists were concerned with showing a gain which no paper or party could dispute.⁵⁰ In a state election such as this, the Social-Democrats were very interested in explaining the difference between themselves and reformers. For La Follette Republicans had, on previous occasions, attracted votes which the Socialists claimed as their own, and intense efforts were made to prevent such a recurrence. Although some people considered Victor Berger's party as a mere reform organization, Berger was vigorous in noting certain basic distinctions between reform and Social-Democracy. In a Labor Day edition of the *Herald*, Berger wrote:

With or without social reform we cannot escape Social-Democracy. The cooperative commonwealth is the aim towards which . . . the entire political and economical development of modern times is moving.

A Social-Democracy is the goal of the evolution, and not by any means a far distant goal.

Of course, La Follette, Bryan, Hearst, etc. want to steal our thunder for exactly opposite purposes from ours. They want to preserve the system.

But we are revolutionists.

We are revolutionary not in the vulgar meaning of the word, which is entirely wrong, but in the sense illustrated by history, the only logical sense. For it is foolish to expect any result from riots and dynamite, from murderous attacks and conspiracies, in a country where we have the ballot, as long as the ballot has not been given a full and fair trial. . . .

Up to a certain point . . . the tactics of the Social-Democrats and the social reformers are exactly the same. Both build upon the past historical developments and take into consideration the present conditions. . . .

But the tactics and the aims of the Social-Democrats do indeed differ from those of the social reformers in one essential point. The Social-Democrats never fail to declare that with all the social reforms, good and worthy of support as they may be, conditions cannot be radically and permanently improved.

We Social-Democrats say, we are willing to accept and help on every social reform. But we also say that social reforms are but installments by which we must not allow ourselves to be bribed—that full economic freedom will only be achieved by Social-Democracy.⁵¹

In another article Berger decried the position which the outstanding social reformer of Wisconsin, Robert M. La Follette, had taken in regard to public service corporations:

Robert M. La Follette and his crowd are opposed to public ownership of the railways and favor "regulation" of public service corporations. La Follette is no fool, so this is not hypocrisy. . . . It must be clear to a blind man that if the railroads and public service corporations will permit regulation they will do the regulating. . . . So long as the public service corporations are privately owned the control of the public service corporations by commission will mean the control of the commission by the public service corporations.

So it is pretty clear that this country must choose between the government ownership of public utilities or corporation ownership of our government.⁵²

As a result of another intensive campaign, the Social-Democrats of Wisconsin sold once more show a gain at the ballot box. They polled thirty-six per cent of the vote in Milwaukee county, and throughout the state ran second only to the Republicans. Five staunch Socialists were elected to the assembly in Carl D.

³⁸*Herald*, March 3, 1906. ³⁹*Journal*, March 27, 1906. ⁴⁰*Daily News*, April 30, 1904.

⁴¹*Free Press*, March 5, 1904. ⁴²*Sentinel*, April 4, 5, 1906. ⁴³*Herald*, April 7, 1906.

⁴⁴*Ibid.* ⁴⁵*Journal*, April 4, 1906. ⁴⁶*Herald*, April 7, 1906. ⁴⁷*Ibid.*, June 9, 1906.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, September 1, 1906. ⁴⁹*Ibid.*, September 8, 22, October 13, 1906.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, October 27, 1906.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, September 1, 1906; *Voice and Pen of Victor L. Berger*, 684-685.

⁵²*Ibid.*, October 6, 1906.

Thompson, Frank J. Weber, Frederick Brockhausen, Edmund J. Berner, William J. Alldridge, and the overlapping of Social-Democracy and trade unionism was once again evident.

The only disappointment was in the failure of William Thiel to win the office of district attorney. Berger explained this by saying that some Social-Democrats voted for the Republican candidate, Francis McGovern, because they believed he could beat the "Jesuit candidate," Francis X. Boden, and Thiel could not.⁵⁴ However, the truth may have been somewhat different. The *Journal* maintained that Thiel had made some vicious attacks on the courts, and that the people in general were sensitive to such attacks because they associated the district attorneys with the courts. The *Journal* further stated that the Socialists had distributed over 480,000 pieces of campaign literature, and that if they had not split the vote, they would have had no difficulty in electing Mr. Thiel. He missed carrying the county by only 170 votes, and actually carried the city, for he was reported the victor in the early returns.⁵⁵

In the years 1906-1908, the Socialists did a great deal to perfect their organization, both in and out of public office. The first thing they did was attempt to plug a deficit of \$2,500 in the party coffers; they began this endeavor by asking for a day's wages from members who could spare it, and in one week they raised almost \$600.⁵⁶ Then they turned to perfecting their propaganda machine. Lectures were regularly sponsored on Sunday evenings, and the method of disseminating literature was made more effective.

The Socialists and sympathizers who volunteered to distribute party literature were called the Bundle Brigade. The effectiveness of that corps of faithful workers was made possible only by a complete central organization, which included a literature committee and a cooperative bindery. When a certain type of literature was to be dispensed, the county executive committee would so inform the county organizer. He, in turn, would apprise the individual ward chairmen, and they would notify the volunteer workers, the Bundle Brigade, under their direction. By 1908, the organization of this Bundle Brigade had become so efficient that within forty-eight hours after it had been decided to circularize the people on any public question, the literature desired could be placed in almost every home in the city in the language best understood by its inhabitants. Of course, the fact that the party had its own printing presses aided immeasurably in that work, keeping costs down to a minimum and by abolishing many inconveniences.⁵⁷

In the biennium of 1906-1908, the Social-Democratic aldermen gained a respected reputation. They composed twelve of the forty-six aldermen; and although on the surface it would seem that so small a minority would be powerless, the published reports of the council sessions tell a different story. They voted as a unit on every question, and nearly all the proposals that attracted serious public attention during these years emanated from this minority. The Socialist membership alone came to the meetings with definite policies agreed upon, with arguments prepared on pending measures, together with complete and usually accurate information as to the progress of municipal business.⁵⁸

A contemporary scholar said that the group of Socialist aldermen in those years came to be looked upon as the greatest factor in the government of Milwaukee.

Furthermore, he attributed the appreciation of municipal duty in the city to the work of the Socialist agitator. It was true that municipal ownership had gained a multitude of adherents in the orthodox parties. Likewise, adult education, added public recreational centers and parks, municipal garbage disposal service, and the furnishing of water, had all become part of the city's growing social consciousness.⁵⁹ The Socialists in and out of the common council also took the lead in demanding an elective school board and a new deal for the schools, but up to 1908, they were not successful.⁶⁰

Early in 1907, Mayor Sherburn Becker unwittingly aided the Socialist cause by delivering a speech which was meant to injure it. In an after-dinner speech to a Harvard fraternity, he referred to the Social-Democrats as "the scum of the earth." The next day he was met by a rebuttal, not only from Socialists, but from the capitalist press as well. The *Journal* carried an editorial on the subject, with a rebuke to the mayor. It refuted his statement as being untrue, and described the Socialist party membership as being made up largely of workingmen. "As a matter of fact," said the *Journal*, "the scum of the earth is not to be found in the Socialist party. The Republican and Democratic parties have the lead in that respect in Milwaukee, as the mayor ought to know." The editorial further suggested that the Socialist arguments for a new economic regime should be met by reason, not by slander and abuse, and if the Socialist reasoning prevailed, then their system would be triumphant. It closed with the advice that, "An apology would seem to be in order."⁶¹ It took a foolish statement by the mayor to produce for the Socialists so favorable an article from the Republican *Journal*. The *Daily News* similarly decried the lack of self-control of a mayor who claimed he had been "egged-on" to his unfortunate words by the Federated Trades Council.⁶²

The brewery workers' union took immediate action on the mayor's speech. They passed resolutions stating that the insult to the Social-Democratic party had also been an insult to them, and that they would remember the episode when the next election day appeared.⁶³ For reasons more serious than the giving of maligned speeches, the Socialists started proceedings in the common council preliminary to impeachment against Becker. However, they were voted down 26-13.⁶⁴

In the interim, between the elections of 1906 and 1908, the state legislature had prevailed upon to pass a new law governing the election of aldermen in Milwaukee.⁶⁵ Ostensibly, the new piece of legislation was to guarantee that Milwaukee elect an honest set of city councilmen, but it strongly hinted of Democratic and Republican cooperation, in order to make sure that the Social-Democrats were not victorious in the near future. The important part of the law read that, "In each city of the first class⁶⁶ of the state whether operating under a general or special charter there shall be elected to the common council as members thereof, twelve aldermen at large and one alderman from each ward. . . ."⁶⁷

⁵⁴ Larson, *A Financial and Administrative History of Milwaukee* (Madison, 1908), 157.

⁵⁵ *Herald*, March 30, April 6, October 10, November 2, 1907; *Journal*, November 1, 1907.

⁵⁶ *Journal*, February 21, 1907. ⁵⁷ *Daily News*, February 21, 1907. ⁵⁸ *Herald*, March 2, 1907.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, May 2, 1907. *Proceedings of the Common Council* (1907-1908), 191-192. The mayor was accused of giving the chief of police instructions to protect "certain notorious dens of vice."

⁶⁰ The city of Milwaukee was not operating under home rule. Article 11, section 3, of the Wisconsin constitution provided that the method of determining local affairs and government should be prescribed by the legislature. *The Wisconsin Blue Book*, 1940 (Madison, 1940), 223.

⁶¹ Milwaukee was finally given home rule by a 1933 statute of the legislature. *The Charter of the City of Milwaukee, 1934* (Milwaukee, 1934), Chapter VI. Before that time questions of method of election of municipal ownership were by necessity submitted to the legislature.

⁶² A city of the first class was one with over 150,000 population. Milwaukee was the only such city in 1900.

⁶³ *The Laws of Wisconsin, Joint Resolutions and Memorials, 1909* (Madison, 1909), section 925-122. This volume includes the laws of 1907 which were amended or unchanged.

⁵⁹ *Herald*, November 10, 1906. Robert Ruseh, a staunch Social-Democrat at the time, stated to the author on August 6, 1942, that Thiel was defeated because close to 200 Socialists refused to vote for him after he failed to sign the traditional resignation pledge of the party. (See Chapter II, pages 22-23, for pledge.) ⁶⁰ *Journal*, November 7, 1906. ⁶¹ *Herald*, December 1, 8, 1906.

⁶² *History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victories*, 15-18.

⁶³ *Proceedings of the Common Council* (1906-1908).

It became effective in July, 1907, and although the Socialists raised no formal objection at the time, they were hard hit by its effect in the next election.

Following passage of the aldermanic law, rumors of fusion between the Republicans and Democrats were heard. But in every case, the Socialists welcomed such rumors, since they believed the distinction between socialism and capitalism would thereby be drawn more sharply.⁶⁶ As yet the rumors proved false; until the Socialists actually carried the city, the older parties were unwilling to forget the differences.

On Saturday evening, February 29, 1908, the city convention of the Social Democrats was held at the Freie Gemeinde hall. The platform adopted this time made a definite appeal to the business and professional men of the city. After mentioning the Socialist demands, which had by now become more constructive, and included the establishment of a public works department and the building of a labor temple by the city, the platform concluded with the following statement:

The Social-Democracy combats not alone the conditions which exploit and oppress the wage working classes, but every kind of exploitation and oppression whether directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race. All its measures benefit not only the wage working class but the whole people, and while the working people are the banner bearers in the fight, in the last analysis everybody—the merchant, the professional man and the small shopkeeper—will profit thereby. Therefore, we invite every honest and well meaning man without regard to occupation, race or creed to join in our undertaking for the emancipation of mankind.⁶⁷

Class-consciousness took a back seat in this 1908 platform of the Milwaukee Social-Democrats.

Emil Seidel was chosen as candidate for mayor in this election. The choice was a good one. Although he had been born in America, he could speak German as well as English and made a fine appeal in the German wards. His work in the common council was extraordinary, yet he had not made himself obnoxious, even in the eyes of the capitalists. He was a workingman and kept hammering at the labor vote in order to impress them that his party was the only true party of the workers.⁶⁸

In this campaign, the Socialists virtually for the first time made promises to the electorate. The voters were notified that if they were elected, they would inaugurate an administration of experts. Berger declared that in every case where the Socialists did not have the requisite talent, they would get the best expert advice available.⁶⁹ Ultimately, in 1910, the Socialists established a bureau of economy and efficiency to make history for municipal government in Milwaukee.

From the files of the newspapers, the campaign appears to be one of the most disgraceful in Milwaukee's history. The Socialists were hampered by two incidents. First, Emma Goldman appeared in the city and made several speeches which were advertised as under Socialist auspices, but with which the Socialists had no connection. They had been trying to get away from the taint of anarchy for some years, and the appearance of this well-known anarchist did them harm. Second, three youths shot and robbed the treasurer of a Polish savings society. The cry was raised among Poles that these youths were Socialists. Fortunately the English papers gave no credence to the accusation, but the Poles were again one of the reasons for a Social-Democratic defeat for the mayoralty.⁷⁰

⁶⁶*Herald*, January 4, 1908. ⁶⁷*Ibid.*, March 7, 1908. ⁶⁸*Ibid.*, March 27, 1908.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, March 27, 1908.

⁷⁰*Municipal Campaign Book of the Social-Democratic Party, 1912* (Milwaukee, 1912), 4. On March 11, 1908, the Socialist party headquarters, Milwaukee. ⁷¹*Herald*, April 11, 1908.

The *Journal* carried a four-column advertisement for the Social-Democrats before the election. It also suggested four Socialists for aldermen at large, and headed for a slate which would do away with corruption.⁷⁴ But the voters did not listen to the *Journal*. David Rose and his Democratic followers, who had been ousted from office two years before on charges of graft, swept the city. Rose defeated Seidel by only two thousand votes, but the Democrats elected only one of the twelve aldermen at large.⁷⁵ The vote in the Polish wards had again carried Rose to victory, but the *Journal* said the result was a disgrace to the Polish priests who had openly favored him.⁷⁶

The Socialists clearly defeated the Republicans in this campaign, and although they elected only nine aldermen against twelve in 1906, a moral victory was theirs. In 1906, they had carried six wards, and elected two men in each ward, and if the system of election had remained the same, they would have elected eighteen aldermen in 1908, since they captured nine wards.⁷⁷ The plan of the state legislature to clean up Milwaukee government by electing aldermen at large was manifestly a failure. The new system of election had been instituted supposedly to promote good government along non-partisan lines. Yet the results showed a more clearly partisan victory than had been the case in many years.

The Social-Democrats had taken a temporary set-back in the common council, but their faith in victory had not been diminished. Their spiritual and political guide, Victor Berger, said after the election: "Two years hence we will take up our fight with renewed vigor and clean out the Augean stables in the city hall of Milwaukee."⁷⁸ Berger had been making such predictions for many years, but this time his prophecy was to come true.

Meanwhile, there was work to be done prior to the state and national elections of 1908. The national convention of the Socialist party was held in Chicago during May. There was some sentiment against Debs at the assemblage, because of his connection with the attempt to organize a dual labor organization. Nevertheless, he was nominated for president, and Ben Hanford, of New York, was chosen as his running mate.⁷⁹

The state convention took place in Milwaukee on Saturday and Sunday, June 13 and 14. The platform adopted was more specific than before and included sixteen planks. Harvey Dee Brown, of Racine, was nominated for governor, subject to a party referendum.⁸⁰ The referendum was overwhelmingly in his favor and the party slate was announced on July 11.⁸¹

Debs appeared in Milwaukee in July to give the campaign a good start. He spoke to 20,000 listeners at the state Socialist picnic in Pabst Park.⁸² Picnics were a most useful organizing medium of the Socialists, and during the summer many Jewish, Bohemian, German, and Polish branches held such open-air outings under the direction of county organizer, Edmund Melms.⁸³

It was estimated in this campaign that the farmers would vote in greater measure with the Socialists. Berger had consistently maintained that the farmers were on the capitalist side by mistake. He attempted to quiet their fears concerning expropriation by the Socialists, and classed them alongside the worker in regard to their ownership of property.⁸⁴

Nevertheless, the appeal of the party was still mainly to the workingman in the cities, and especially in Milwaukee. Therefore, Debs concluded his campaign

⁷⁴*Journal*, April 4, 1908. ⁷⁵*Herald*, April 12, 1908. ⁷⁶*Journal*, April 8, 1908.

⁷⁷*Herald*, April 11, 1908.

⁷⁸*Ibid.* ⁷⁹*Ibid.*, May 9, 1908.

⁸⁰*Ibid.*, June 20, 1908.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, July 11, 1908.

⁸²*Ibid.*, July 18, 1908.

⁸³*Ibid.*, July 25, 1908.

⁸⁴*Ibid.*, January 5, 12, 26 and August 24, 1907.

SOCIALISM TRIUMPHANT

before three monster meetings in Milwaukee on the Saturday before election. The Pabst theater, the West Side Turner hall, and the Freie Gemeinde hall were filled to capacity to hear the idol of the workingman.⁸⁵

In spite of these speeches, and the fact that the national Socialist vote increased from 400,000 to well over a half million, the apostle of the Socialist party failed to hold his Milwaukee vote of 1904.⁸⁶ He ran over a thousand votes behind the local Socialist candidates in the county. Harvey Brown won 18,377 votes for governor in Milwaukee county, while Debs polled a total of 17,092. A loss was also recorded for the Socialists in Wisconsin when Carl Thompson and William Alldridge failed of re-election to the state assembly; Berner, Brons hausen, and Weber were re-elected to the assembly, and Gaylord won a berth in the state senate.⁸⁷

In general, the year 1908 was one of political reverses to the Social-Democrats of Milwaukee and Wisconsin, but those reverses proved to be a mere interlude before a complete victory. Between 1904 and 1908, the party members had worked more intensely than ever in order to perfect their organization and methods of disseminating propaganda.⁸⁸ Their effort was not in vain.

⁸⁵*Herald*, October 31, 1908.

⁸⁶*Sentinel*, November 4 and 5, 1908.

⁸⁷*Journal*, November 4, 1908.

⁸⁸Carl Sandburg was one of the party organizers in the state during those years (*Herald*, 1904-1908); later he became the secretary to Milwaukee's first Socialist mayor (*History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victories*, opposite page 48).

THE SPRING ELECTION of 1909 marked a renewal of Social-Democratic triumphs. Carl Seidel carried the city in a special election for alderman at large, caused by the death of one of the councilmen, Francis J. Stiglebauer. Likewise, Mrs. Victor L. Berger and Frederic Heath were elected to the school board.¹

Seidel was nominated by the Socialists on his previous record as an alderman. He had a good reputation among all classes of voters, and the campaign for his reelection capitalized on that fact. This time it was not Seidel the Socialist, but Seidel the man, whose deeds were spread out before the citizens of Milwaukee. The appeal was made that Seidel was the most capable man for the position, and that Republicans and Democrats should vote for him on that basis, regardless of his party affiliation.² Truly, that was an innovation in Social-Democratic campaigning. But it brought results, and the Socialists carried the city for the first time since they had begun putting up men for office.³

In contrast with the aldermanic race, the school board election was run on non-partisan lines. It was mistakenly believed that this feature would keep politics out of the contest. The Socialists had consistently been the leaders in the fight for a better school system in Milwaukee; they wanted the schools to receive an amount of money which would be adequate for efficient operation. In the preceding city election a bond issue of \$300,000 had been authorized for the schools, but Mayor Rose refused to see that the schools received the money, and was in favor of using most of it for improving the streets.⁴ With this in mind, the Social-Democrats at their city convention made a real issue of the administering and financing of the schools, nominating six candidates for the school board, although those candidates' names appeared on the ballot with no party designation attached to them.⁵

Victor Berger's wife, Meta, and Frederic Heath, editor of the *Herald*, were the Socialists elected to the school board. Henry Raasch was a holdover incumbent, who had been elected on a Federated Trades Council ticket. And by a curious combination of circumstances the Socialists gained a fourth member, Mrs. Charles B. Whitnall.⁶ Mrs. Whitnall had been one of the better known members on the previous board, but was on the Pacific coast at the time of the new election. Consequently, she did not know that her name was used on the citizens' Anti-Socialist Ticket in the day preceding the voting. The anti-Socialists had committed a foolish error in using her name, for her husband had been an active member of the Socialist party for a dozen years; and, although Mrs. Whitnall was not a member of the party, she had applied for membership before leaving for the Pacific coast, and was duly accepted a few weeks after the election.⁷

The entire campaign of 1909 had cost the Social-Democratic party only three hundred dollars, but they regretted having limited themselves to such a small sum. The feeling among party leaders was that they would have elected several more school board members, and two judges, if they had allowed themselves more money to work with. They vowed not to be penny-wise in their next political struggle.⁸

¹*Journal*, April 7, 1909.

²*Herald*, April 3, 1909.

³*Sentinel*, April 7, 1909.

⁴*Daily News*, January 30, 1909; *Herald*, March 13, 1909.

⁵*Herald*, March 13, 1909.

⁶*Ibid.*, July 10, 1909.

⁷*Ibid.*, September 4, 1909.

⁸*Ibid.*, April 10, 1909.

by this time the people of Milwaukee had tired of hearing about the Socialist menace. Those Socialists who had gained offices in the common council and county board had generally been sober, civic-minded individuals, and most of the constructive legislation in these bodies had emanated from them. The old politicians had cried so often, "Elect me or a Socialist will be elected," and had painted the Social-Democratic party in such impossibly dark colors, that Milwaukeeans had begun to wonder if the Socialist menace was merely a bogey. The sentiments of many serious-minded citizens in this matter were expressed by an editorial in the often anti-Socialist *Daily News*:

Who are these Socialists that so frighten our monopolists and professional politicians? Are they the loafers, the thugs, the gamblers, pickpockets, and the criminal elements of the community? Are they the repeaters at our elections? No; they are hard-working men constituting one of the best and most industrious elements of our population. It was a very element that, before the Socialist party made its remarkable growth in Milwaukee, could be depended upon to vote for reform movements in the Republican party and never stood against graft, corruption and crooked politicians. They are workers and business owners, and have "a stake in the community."

... It is an insult to the intelligence of the people of Milwaukee constantly to hold out the thousands of hard-working, industrious men that compose the bulk of the Socialist party as a menace to the community. Instead of being a menace, they are one of the chief sources of its prosperity. In this connection we need not consider Socialism whatever. For it is within the power of the Socialists of Milwaukee to enact Socialism—the most that they could do, even if given a free hand in municipal affairs, would be to work a program of moderate reforms. . . .¹

It is difficult to find a better appeal than the above in any of the Social-Democratic literature.

Several months before the municipal elections of 1910, objective Republicans and Democrats were already predicting a Socialist victory. The Social-Democrats were certain that the people would turn to them after the disillusionment they suffered during the administrations of Becker and Rose.²⁰ The mask carnival broke all records in 1910, and the organization of the party was more firm than it had ever been.²¹ Its solidarity was especially manifested when a great surprise birthday party was given for Victor Berger, on February 28, 1910. All the old members and active workers of the party were there, and they promised their leader a victory in the forthcoming political struggle.²²

Rather inauspiciously, the Social-Democratic party, on February 19, 1910, announced its city ticket, the result of a referendum of the organization. Having been the first Socialist to carry the city, Emil Seidel was nominated for mayor. Other choices were: Charles B. Whitnall for treasurer; Daniel Webster Hanson, a young lawyer, who had first made his political appearance as a Socialist precinct challenger in 1908, for city attorney; Carl P. Dietz, for comptroller; Victor Berger, and six other men, for alderman at large; and Richard Elsner, Joseph Cordes, and John C. Kleist, for judicial offices.²³

It has been noted that the platforms of the party had progressively become more concrete, and the one adopted on February 26, 1910, followed the prevalent trend. There was good reason why the Social-Democratic platform adopted by the ward delegates was more practical in 1910. Between 1904 and 1910, an increasing number of Socialists had held public office. They saw, in the common council, in the county board, in the state legislature, the actual problems of

municipal administration, and they realized that many immediate things had to be taken care of before their cooperative commonwealth was established. Similarly, the Socialists outside of office had become more improvement-minded regarding their city. In the years 1908-1910, the *Herald* contained weekly articles by members of the party who had conducted studies of one or more phases of the city's government. These articles were more than derogatory; they contained specific, constructive criticism whereby the community would benefit. The men who wrote the articles were future officials of Milwaukee.

The working program of the latest platform, instead of stressing municipal ownership first, opened with the demand that a new charter be formulated, by which the city would be empowered to conduct its own affairs and meet the needs of its own life. Complete home rule in municipal matters, and the right of inaugurating the initiative, the referendum, and the right of recall, were also demanded in the first plank. Other planks dealt with the collection of taxes, a municipal railway terminal, a public works department, the sewage system, a city hospital, and the treatment of firemen and policemen. All of the reforms which the Socialists contemplated putting into effect could not be included in the sixteen-plank platform. Therefore, a series of resolutions were passed which were actually a part of the platform under which Social-Democrats ran for office.²⁴

The primary elections clearly demonstrated that the Socialists were due for a victory. In spite of the fact that there was no incentive for Socialists to vote in the primaries, other than to see that their candidates polled a sufficient number of votes to gain a place on the final election ballot, they turned out in greater number than the Republicans or Democrats. While every Social-Democratic candidate survived the primaries, except one alderman in the hopeless seventh ward, the Republicans could not muster enough strength to ensure being on the ballot in ten wards, and their candidate for mayor, Dr. John Bessel, barely won the required twenty per cent of the party's last vote.²⁵ The battle most certainly was to be between the Democratic and Social-Democratic parties. It looked as if fear of the "red spectre" had diminished considerably in Milwaukee, and that the literary campaign of the Socialists had met with some success.

But the Republicans and Democrats had not given up hope. The daily newspapers were full of anti-Socialist editorials and advertisements.²⁶ The onslaught was aimed primarily at Victor Berger, though Emil Seidel was the party's mayor-elect candidate. Berger for years had been preaching a method of arming the people similar to the Swiss militia system, and the opposition papers used carefully selected quotations from his articles in an effort to prove that he advocated overthrow of the government by force. Typical of the pre-election propaganda was the statement from the *Free Press* that, "We do not care who or what Mr. Seidel is. We know that back of him—his inspiration, his governor—stands Victor Berger and his doctrine of class war and bullet ballots."²⁷

The Republicans and Democrats predicted a catastrophe for Milwaukee if the Socialists gained control of its administration and its legislative bodies. The Democrats carried advertisements in the daily papers declaring that if the Socialists were victorious, capital would be idle, workingmen would be put out of work, and the credit of the city would be ruined.²⁸ But this time their charges did not go unanswered, for the Socialists bought a great deal of advertising space in the

¹*Daily News*, May 31, 1909.

²⁰*Herald*, January 29, 1910.

²¹*Ibid.*, February 5, 1910.

²²*Ibid.*, March 5, 1910.

²³*Ibid.*, February 19, 1910; Milwaukee, *The Voice of the People*, March 12, 1910.

²⁴*Ibid.*, March 5, 1910; Milwaukee *The Voice of the People*, March 10, 1910. See Appendix B for platform of 1910.

²⁵*Ibid.*, March 26, 1910; *Journal*, March 23, 1910.

²⁶See especially *Daily News*, March 2, 1910; *Free Press*, March 27 and 31, 1910; *Journal*, April 1, 1910.

²⁷*Free Press*, March 31, 1910.

²⁸*Journal*, April 1, 1910.

same papers and adequately answered every charge of their opponents, except a bullet and ballot charge against Berger, which they wisely ignored.¹⁹

Likewise, the Socialists campaigned through their own weekly paper, the *Herald*, and distributed a campaign paper, the *Voice of the People*, to every home in Milwaukee for five Sundays preceding the election. The *Voice of the People* was printed in German and English, or in Polish and English, and took the most out of the effect which the daily papers had on the electorate.²⁰ The entire campaign of the Socialists was directed at the citizenry in a confident and positive manner. Compared to previous years, a surprisingly small amount of abuse was pointed at the capitalist system.

On the Saturday before election day an editorial, unique in the history of Milwaukee politics, appeared in the *Journal*. It claimed that all three candidates for mayor, John Bessel, the Republican, Vincenz Schoeneker, the Democrat, and Emil Seidel, the Socialist, were capable men and were well qualified for the office. No sign of favoritism was betrayed, and the *Journal* actually stated that, "Mr. Seidel is not only a man of executive ability, who has successfully managed his private enterprises, but he is a man of imagination and a student. . . ."²¹

Such a conviction was evidently held by many Milwaukeeans, for Emil Seidel swept Milwaukee on April 6, 1910, and carried the city by one of the largest pluralities in its history. Along with him, the Social-Democrats elected their entire city ticket, all seven aldermen at large, and two civil judges. Victor Berger, who had led the Socialists through so many campaigns, was finally elected to public office as one of the seven aldermen at large, and Richard Elsner, whose name had been appearing on Socialist tickets since 1898, was at last elected a judge of the civil court. The most important result was that the Socialists had carried the entire city administration, and now had a majority of twenty-one to fourteen in the common council, and eleven to five in the county board of supervisors.

Seidel polled 27,622 votes to 20,513 for Schoeneker and 11,262 for Bessel.²² His victory and that of the Socialists was especially complete since they carried the fourteenth ward, on which the Democratic party was supposed to have a perpetual mortgage. The inhabitants of that ward were mostly Poles and Roman Catholics, and although the priests again opposed the Socialists, the majority of their congregations voted "red."²³ The Socialists had put forth a concerted effort to capture that Polish district. They had distributed great quantities of literature there, and had sent numerous Polish speakers into the ward. On November 6, 1909, they had established a Polish newspaper, the *Naprzod*,²⁴ and the effect of the agitation in the Polish language was the carrying of the Polish districts in the spring, and again in the fall of 1910.²⁵

On election night, the Socialists of Milwaukee gathered at the West Side Turner hall to await the returns from different sections of the city. As those reports came in, the Socialists were naturally exultant. A reporter of the *Milwaukee Free Press*, the most violently anti-Socialist paper during the campaign, wrote a graphic account of the gathering:

. . . Such enthusiastic crowds have rarely been gathered together in Milwaukee. All the leaders, the men who have been in the forefront of the twelve year campaign, were there

and were cheered each in turn as they appeared upon the stage, that is, all the leaders were there except one—Victor Berger—and it soon became evident that without this one man the campaign was not complete.

Mr. Seidel stood with his wife within the wings of the West Side Turner hall stage, and did not show himself to the crowd until it was certain that he had won. Even then he did not make a speech until Mr. Berger arrived. When the big chief finally arrived what mighty cheer went up from that crowd! No more noisy and enthusiastic demonstration was granted any man in Milwaukee than was given to Mr. Berger as he walked through a sea of eager faces to the stage.

Mr. Seidel and Mr. Berger appeared before the crowd, arm in arm, and then the booming and din of many hours and the cries and crash of cymbal and of drum seemed to take on an added noise. Mr. Seidel was affected almost to tears and Mr. Berger himself, his calm and stern looking though he is, seemed to be without power of speech.

When the cheering subsided a bit, Mr. Seidel stepped forward, but he was so overcome by his emotions that he could scarcely speak. . . .

If Victor Berger ever had any doubt about how his fellow Social-Democrats regarded him, all his fears were set at rest at . . . that moment last night. The crowd fairly went mad in its desire to pay tribute to the man who above all others has been credited with the leadership of the movement which resulted in Emil Seidel's election to be mayor of Milwaukee.

A full ten minutes the crowd stood up on its feet and cheered for Victor Berger; and flags and tossed hats high in the air; cried and shouted and even wept, for very overflowing of joy. Then Mr. Berger stepped forward, and a hush fell upon the audience as he began to speak.

"I want to ask every man and woman in this audience to stand up here and now and make a solemn pledge to do everything in our power to help the men whom the people have chosen to fulfill their duty," said Mr. Berger.

Like a mighty wave of humanity the crowd surged to its feet, and in a shout that shook the building and echoed down the street to the thousands who waited there, gave the solemn pledge.²⁶

Many Socialists believed that Milwaukee had turned Social-Democratic, but the *Journal* declared that Milwaukee was by no means a Social-Democratic city. It contended that the people had been driven temporarily to Social-Democracy by the unfitness and inefficiency of the old parties. That state of affairs, plus the steady climb of the Social-Democratic vote, made the result of the election inevitable, according to the *Journal*, but it believed that the old parties had learned their lesson and would straighten out their organizations before the public reiterated its sentiments again.²⁷

It has been noted that Victor Berger, and not Emil Seidel, or the Social-Democratic party, bore the brunt of the opposition's abuse during the days before the election. Victor Berger and the Social-Democratic party were synonymous in the minds of many. The morning after the election, the *Sentinel* expressed that feeling as follows:

To the public mind, Social Democracy in this city, and the committee²⁸ which will hold Victor Seidel and his fellow-officials in the hollow of its hands, means—Victor Berger.

We are not saying that to belittle Mr. Seidel, who has our respect as a citizen and our good wishes as a public official, but simply to state an essential and important fact about our Social Democracy.

Substantially it means—Victor L. Berger.

Social Democracy in Milwaukee is what it is, either for good or ill, chiefly because of Mr. Berger. He is its pioneer, its propagandist, its sponsor. Its history is mainly his biography as a citizen of Milwaukee. He rocked it in its cradle, reared it, and now exults to see it battling in control of this great city.²⁹

The Socialists had clearly stated before the election that they would not attempt to foist socialism on Milwaukee, if they won a victory at the polls. After

¹⁹*Journal*, April 1, 2, 1910.

²⁰*Milwaukee The Voice of the People*, March 19, 1910.

²¹*Journal*, April 2, 1910.

²²*Ibid.*, April 6, 1910; *Herald*, April 9, 1910.

²³Victor L. Berger, "What Is the Matter with Milwaukee?" in *The Independent*, LXVIII, No. 429 (April 21, 1910), 840.

²⁴"*Naprzod*" is translated in English as "Forward."

²⁵*History of the Milwaukee Social-Democratic Victory*, 14, 15, 35-39.

²⁶*Free Press*, April 6, 1910.

²⁷*Journal*, April 6, 1910.

²⁸The city central committee of the Social-Democratic party.

²⁹*Sentinel*, April 6, 1910.

their triumph, they repeated the promise that their aim would be to give Milwaukee a good, clean, scientific government. Yet they believed that they could attack the immediate problems of Milwaukee by applying the principles of international socialism to the local situation, and that those principles would have nothing of their revolutionary energy by being thus applied.²⁰ In his first messages to the common council, Emil Seidel demonstrated that the Socialists in office were going to be very practical and thorough.²¹

The work of the Social-Democrats in office is another story; but to conclude the account of their ballot-box victories of 1910, it is necessary to look at the county and congressional elections of November. Victor Berger was elected on November 8 as the first Socialist congressman in the United States. He carried the fifth congressional district of Wisconsin in a close struggle with Henry J. Cochems, the Republican candidate. The area he carried consisted of parts of Milwaukee and Waukesha counties, which were city and rural sections, respectively.²² It was in the latter locality that Oscar Ameringer, the Socialist humorist from Oklahoma, who had been hired as an organizer in Milwaukee, proved of great assistance to Berger.²³

Aside from the election of Berger to congress, the Social-Democrats carried the entire county of Milwaukee and sent thirteen members to the state legislature. In Milwaukee they elected the sheriff, district attorney, coroner, county clerk, county treasurer, register of deeds, and the clerk of courts.²⁴

Thus, in one short year the Social-Democratic party had reversed the governmental status in Milwaukee. In the elections of April and November, 1910, they had gained complete control of the city and county, both in administrative and legislative capacities, and had elected a congressman in the person of their able guide, Victor L. Berger. Their struggles from 1897 to 1910 were beset with obstacles; they experienced many heartbreaking incidents; yet, they persevered and won a chance to make good in the eyes of their neighbors. Although that chance was filled with disillusionment, their accomplishments in office were numerous.

One of the principal problems of Milwaukee's Socialists was to live up to the tenets of socialism, which they had been propounding for years, while governing Milwaukee in a satisfactory manner, and retaining control of a large electorate. What were some of their doctrines, and who expounded them?

The Social-Democrats of Milwaukee adhered to a set of principles which were in the main expressed for them by Victor Berger. Berger was professedly not a Marxist. Rather, he gained most of his ideas on socialism from Ferdinand Lassalle, Karl Kautsky, and Eduard Bernstein. He repeatedly quoted the works of those three men, but seldom referred to Marx to substantiate his views. Berger's socialist philosophy first appeared in organized form as the platform of the Wisconsin *Forwards* in 1893.²⁵ In 1898, his precepts were used as the core of the platform of the Social Democracy of Milwaukee; and the development of his philosophy and that of his party is seen in an examination of each succeeding platform of the party.²⁶

But it is in the front-page articles of the *Herald* written and signed by Victor L. Berger, that one finds a real elaboration of the tenets of Milwaukee's Social

democracy. In one of his first articles for that paper he expressed the views of Milwaukee's Socialists on the methods to be used in reaching the socialist phase of humanity:

All Socialists agree on the final aim and the end proposition of Socialism. But there is a great deal of difference as to the tactics necessary in order to reach the final goal—if there be such a thing as finality in human progress.

The tactics of the American Socialist party, if that party is to succeed—can only be the much abused and much misunderstood Bernstein doctrine.

In America for the first time in history, we find an oppressed class with the same fundamental rights as the ruling class—the right of universal suffrage. It is then nonsense to talk of sudden bloody revolutions here, until the power to ballot has been at least tried. Can a small unarmed minority impose (themselves) by force on a large and well armed majority? . . . The Socialist party in this country must be a party which will take the co-operative commonwealth as the guiding star, and by means of every kind of real, not pretended social reforms, gradually work over our present capitalist state into the socialistic society.²⁷

Berger here left no doubt as to where he and his party stood on the question of a sudden overturn of capitalist society.

He was decidedly anti-communistic, and repeatedly explained the difference, in his mind, between socialism and communism. In one of his better known articles, "Socialism or Communism," he stated:

Our aim is Socialism, not Communism. We want this understood. Between Socialism and Communism there is a great deal of difference.

Collectivism is not a negation of property nor is Socialism. Please keep this in mind. Socialism simply demands the collective ownership of the means of production and distribution. We will produce in common, but the consumption will remain individual. Socialism will control only our capital, not our property. A Socialist Commonwealth will not do away with individual ownership of property, but only with individual ownership of capital.

It is Communism that denies individual ownership of all property. The Communists want to produce and consume in common.²⁸

In other words, Berger believed in the community ownership of all facilities and materials which were used as means of production. He also believed in complete control of the distribution of the results of production. But once those products were distributed for consumption, they were to remain as private personal property. He believed that private ownership of capital had been a necessity for several hundred years, but that it had begun to impede progress, and that collective ownership was a historical necessity.²⁹

Berger, in contradistinction to Daniel De Leon, never attempted to draw a detailed plan of the socialist state. However, he wrote of a transition period between capitalism and socialism. In that era he surmised that all industries of national scope would be carried on by the government, while lesser industries would be operated by productive associations of workers, with capital lent to them by the government. At the same time Berger held that the socialist government, if necessary, should buy out the remnants of capitalism.³⁰ Collectivism was not required in all the means of production at once, but only in those industries where socialist production was possible and a necessity. He made it clear that collectivism was the final aim of socialism, and not its beginning.³¹

The Milwaukee Social-Democrats agreed with Berger's revisionist ideas on socialism. They believed that revolution and reform both meant "a change all through," and that the gradual development of economic conditions would bring

²⁰*Herald*, April 16, 1910.

²¹*Proceedings of the Common Council (1910-1911)*, 2-6.

²²*Herald*, November 12, 1910.

²³Oscar Ameringer, *If You Don't Waken* (New York, 1940), 283-284.

²⁴*Sentinel*, November 9, 1910.

²⁵See above, Chapter I, pages 18-21.

²⁶See Appendix B for platform of 1910.

²⁷*Herald*, October 12, 1901.

²⁸*Ibid.*, July 15, 1905; *The Vanguard*, VI (January, 1908), 79-80.

²⁹*Herald*, July 15, 1905.

³⁰*Ibid.*, April 29, 1905; November 27, 1909.

³¹*Ibid.*, October 12, 1901.

the socialist state without necessarily having any kind of upheaval. The speed of the arrival of the coming state of society, said those Socialists, depended on the rate of enlightenment of the masses.⁴²

Two subjects in which Milwaukee Socialists did not follow Berger's reasoning were woman suffrage and the arming of the masses. His attitude concerning the first matter was peculiar for a man in his position. He believed that the Socialist party should stand by its woman suffrage plank on educational grounds, but did not think that principle should be allowed to delay the progress and efficiency of the socialist movement. Furthermore, on one occasion he stated that women voters might be harmful to his party, since they were too much under the influence of the church, and were generally too reactionary.⁴³ Only once did Berger make these statements in print, for the women in the party immediately answered him in no uncertain terms, and no male member appeared to rescue him.⁴⁴ His attitude on the woman suffrage question was scarcely noticed by his critics, but the position he took regarding arming the people was used against him wherever possible.

On July 31, 1909, an article signed by Victor L. Berger appeared in the *Social-Democratic Herald* entitled "Should Be Prepared to Fight for Liberty at All Hazards." A few paragraphs from that article will illustrate its single theme.

... In view of the plutocratic law-making of the present day, it is easy to predict the safety and hope of this country will finally be in one direction only,—that of a violent and bloody revolution.

Therefore, I say, each of the 500,000 Socialist voters, and of the two million working men who instinctively incline our way, should besides doing much reading and still more thinking, also have a good rifle and the necessary rounds of ammunition in his home and be prepared to back up his ballot with his bullets if necessary.

This may look like a startling statement. Yet I can see nothing else for the American masses today. The working class of this country is being pushed hopelessly downward. We must resist as long as resistance is possible. . . .

I predict that a large part of the capitalist class will be wiped out for much smaller things than the settling of the great social question. That before any settlement is possible most of the plutocratic class, together with the politicians will have to disappear as completely as the feudal lords and their retinue disappeared during the French revolution. . . .

And in order to be prepared for all emergencies, Socialists and working men should make it their duty to have rifles and the necessary rounds of ammunition at their homes and be prepared to back up their ballots with their bullets if necessary.⁴⁵

This article was later called "Ballots and Bullets" by the foes of the first Socialist congressman of America. It was used to an extreme by the opponents of the Social-Democratic party and of Berger in the campaigns of 1910, and appeared later to plague Berger in his fights for re-election.⁴⁶

Other members of the party never openly subscribed to the views found in the publicized article of July 31, 1909. Among those of Berger's immediate colleagues who are still living (August, 1942), the sentiment is expressed that he was probably making one of his singular attempts of appealing to the workingman with something striking, and had gone too far.

In the two weeks following July 31, Berger was compelled to answer the criticism and attacks against him which appeared all over the country. Thus, on August 14, 1909, his reply to all critics appeared in the *Herald*. He stated that he had written the same thing many times before, and had never been rebuked, and went on to explain his complete theory that a people armed on the order of the

Romans, were the best guarantee of order and freedom in a country.⁴⁷ But his rebuttal lacked conviction and logic.

True, Berger had written of arming the people many times before, but in no previous case had he written such an unshackled version of his ideas on that subject. Hardly a month went by from August, 1901, to August, 1910, in which he did not make some reference in the *Herald* to the benefits of allowing the people to keep arms in their homes. However, in every instance before July 31, 1909, he included a discussion of the Swiss militia system, and made it clear that he strongly opposed the overturning of society by bloodshed. One of his better and somewhat less excited articles on arming the people was published in April, 1905, and was called, "Moving by the Light of Reason." In that article he said:

I would like to see a systematic way of arming all the people. Not for the sake of a revolution, but for the sake of peace and progress.

Frederic Engels once said: "Give every citizen a good rifle and fifty cartridges and you have the best guarantee for the liberty of the people." Thomas Jefferson held the same view exactly.

An armed people is always a free people. Even demagogues and parasites would have a much harder time of it than they have today.

With the nation armed (as, for instance, in Switzerland) reforms of all kinds are carried out easily and without bloodshed. With the nation armed, the proletariat could even trust capitalist parties with at least earnestly desiring social reforms and with making an earnest attempt to carry them out.

With the nation armed in a systematic way the capitalist class need not fear any sudden uprising—there are less riots in Switzerland where the people are armed, than in Russia where they are disarmed. But with the nation armed, the workingmen are not in danger of being shot down like dogs on the least provocation.⁴⁸

On the same breath Berger declared himself in favor of socialistic reforms, no matter how minute, and maintained that the only way to break down the capitalist system was to keep making inroads on it by demanding and attaining more and more reforms in favor of the working class.

There is an element of logic in Berger's line of reasoning, but he never adequately linked his ideas on constructive socialism with those on giving the people arms in order that they might preserve their liberty. Only one of his essays on the latter question showed a complete one-sidedness, but he was a long time in living that one down. The Social-Democratic party showed wisdom and tact in allowing provocations against them regarding Berger's pet theory to go unanswered. In this way, Berger absorbed most of the criticism himself. None of the Social-Democratic literature elaborated the theme of arming the people, except in so far as Berger mentioned it. Even though he was its founder, chief spokesman, and philosophical leader, the Social-Democratic party should not be held responsible for an inconsistency which seemingly was entirely his own.

CONCLUSION

The Social Democratic party reached its enviable position of November, 1910, through no fanatical grip on a set of principles, but through an ability and willingness to compromise, and to appeal to a continually larger and more varied constituency. Its first years were occupied mainly with winning the confidence and favor of the trade-unionists. Gradually, it won over the bulk of the working class, and it was not long until the small business man was made the object of a successful appeal.

⁴²*Herald*, August 24, 1901. ⁴³*Ibid.*, July 17, 1909. ⁴⁴*Ibid.*, July 24, 31, 1909.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, July 31, 1909.

⁴⁶Berger, "What Is the Matter with Milwaukee?" in *The Independent*, LXVIII, No. 3203 (April 1, 1910), 840; *Free Press*, March 27, 31, 1910; *Daily News*, March 2, 1910; *Journal*, November 5, 7, 1910.

⁴⁷*Herald*, August 14, 1909.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, April 15, 1905.

The perseverance of the Social-Democrats of Milwaukee was something to excite admiration. Their organization in 1910 would be the envy of any political machine today. Every ward branch was a self-sufficient entity, which carried a propaganda for the cause of socialism, and campaigned with vigor before an election. The development of the party press, and the dissemination of party literature had progressed almost to perfection, with a Bundle Brigade ready to do its duty whenever called. Even the Polish citizens of the fourteenth ward finally succumbed to the constantly reiterated statements of the Socialists. Other American cities had socialists and strong socialist parties, but none could boast of leadership and an organization equal to that of Milwaukee's Social-Democrats.

The effects of the Socialists' organization, perseverance, literature distribution and willingness to compromise were not strange. By 1910, the people of Milwaukee in general did not look at them as harebrained agitators. Even the shouting of the old party politicians concerning Victor Berger's beliefs on ballots and bullets struck deaf ears. It had become exceedingly difficult to convince serious-minded individuals that the stolid workers who composed the bulk of the Social Democratic party were plotting a sudden overthrow of society.

It was realized that, even if they wanted to, the Socialists could not abolish capitalism in Milwaukee. On the other hand, they were the only party whose hands and reputation were not soiled by connections with the corruption which had recently been uncovered in municipal affairs. Furthermore, they presented a slate of honest men, and an appearance of sincerity which was sadly lacking in Republican and Democratic circles. Rather than suffer another administration with the old party politicians at the helm, the voters of Milwaukee decided to give their Socialist neighbors a chance to prove their worth.

A. LETTER TO DANIEL DE LEON FROM THE OFFICE OF VICTOR L. BERGER*

Milwaukee, Wis., Oct. 22, 1897.

My Daniel De Leon,
New York City.

Dear Sir & Comrade:

On the 1st of January a daily paper in the English language will be launched in Milwaukee. Its policy will be uncompromisingly Socialistic. A stock company has been formed with a paid-in stock of \$25,000, mainly by the efforts of Mr. Victor L. Berger and some of his young American friends who devoutly champion the cause of socialism, to which company has been turned over the daily Wisconsin Vorwaerts and its plant and organization. The new paper will sell for one cent on the streets, will give all the news, gathered by men who have the Socialistic training necessary for effective style in dishing up their items. The paper will be issued under the auspices of the Social Democracy, but will not be partizan for that organization as against any other Socialistic organization based on scientific socialism. It will preach the Socialism of Marx, Engels, La Salle (his spirit without his schemes) and that of the Social Democrats of Germany and France, while recognizing American conditions. Therefore it will be an opponent of all colony schemes, that of its own party not excepted. The paper will employ three reporters, a city editor, desk editors and an editorial writer who will bear the brunt of the editorial work, Mr. Berger being obliged to give the greater part of his efforts to the German paper and to the business management. We had hoped to get a capable man for the editorial position for \$25 a week at the start, hoping to be able to raise the amount as the paper grew in financial strength. We feel, however, that much of the paper's success will depend on the worth of the editorial matter furnished from the start and for this reason make bold to offer you the position at a salary of \$30 a week. We are aware that this will not seem a large amount to you, but living is cheaper in Milwaukee than in New York and it is all we would be able to pay at the start. There may be reasons that may tempt you to link your fortunes with the middle West. Chicago and this part of the country are destined to be the theater of the great events of the future, as you are doubtless well aware. There would be nothing really inconsistent in your editing such a paper as we have indicated as there would be no disposition to muzzle you nor to restrain you from justly attacking the new Social Democratic movement whenever necessary. The differences between the two Socialistic movements in this country amount merely to questions of method and a few cases to petty personal jealousies. Ultimately they will have to unite against the common enemy. We trust you are too big sized to mind what little local dishonest pygmies, small jealous would-be dictators say about us in general and Mr. Berger in particular. Please let us know, within two weeks from date, whether you accept or not. In case you should decide not to accept, we trust to your honor that you will not mention this letter or its contents to anybody, but should you accept we will also furnish you transportation from New York to Milwaukee.

Yours for the cause,

FRED HEATH, *Vice Pres.*

EDWARD HOLTON JAMES,

Secretary

B. MILWAUKEE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC CITY PLATFORM, 1910†

The great question before the people of the United States and before the citizens of Milwaukee today is the trust question.

The trusts make their existence felt in every household of the land—from garret to cellar, from drawing room to kitchen.

The Trust Question Is Now a Local Issue

The trust is not only a subject for national legislation—it has become a state and local issue. The fight all through has become a fight of the people's interests against the "special interests."

*This is a rough draft of the original letter; from the files of the Milwaukee County Historical Society.
†From *The Voice of the People* (Milwaukee), March 19, 1910.

Not only do the trusts play a great part in our state politics, but they are likewise responsible for our local conditions. We have in Milwaukee many local monopolies controlling necessities of life, such as the ice trust and the coal trust.

Furthermore, our public utilities now form a part of the gigantic system of public service trusts. This is the case with the telephone system, which has merged with the Western Union Telegraph company—the street car company, the electric light plant and the gas works, all of which are a part of the North American Securities trust.

The trust question, therefore, must be met locally as well as nationally.

Trust Ownership of the Nation

As to the trusts—it is a fact, that the modern development of business in many instances has made monopoly inevitable. Monopoly is here whether we like it or not. So the only question is whether it shall be public or private monopoly.

And the private ownership of the monopoly has clearly shown the evils of the present system.

The trusts have proved that nowadays a small number of capitalists have it in their power to decide how much meat and how much bread we shall eat; how much we shall spend for coal and how much for oil; how nicely or how poorly we shall be clothed and housed; what kind of furniture we are permitted to use; and in what kind of a coffin we are to be buried. They can do this by fixing the price of everything. In short, the trusts decide how well or how ill, how long or how short a time we shall live.

The Social-Democratic party, therefore, insists that the production of this country shall be taken away from the control of a small number of irresponsible and greedy men whose aim is to exploit us to the last limit of our endurance.

In its national platform the Social-Democratic party demands that the nation shall own the trusts, because it is clear that as long as the trusts are in private hands the trusts own the nation.

Locally we demand that the evils of the trust be combatted with all means at our command, as we show further on.

Reform Parties Hopeless

There is nothing to be hoped from either of the old parties. The Republican and Democratic parties do not differ in any essential point. Both are in favor of upholding the present system. The trusts grew up nationally and locally with their help. Both of them are trust-owned.

All the high sounding clamor of Republican and Democratic reformers is sheer hypocrisy and a bid for votes. These reform organizations, willingly or unwillingly, serve as feeders for the trust-owned national parties of Aldrich and Bailey. These reformers have never accomplished anything of value anywhere. All they accomplish is that they keep some good and honest but gullible men within the lines of the capitalist parties.

The Old Game of the Ins and Outs

As far as the Republican and Democratic parties are concerned, elections for them are simply the old game of "Ins and Outs" for the politicians. The Ins want to stay in office and the Outs want to get the office.

Give the Trusts Their First Hard Knock

Every interest of the people suffers more or less at this time from the trust ownership of the nation and from the high prices. But the workers suffer most.

The trusts fear nothing by Socialism and the Social-Democratic party. Therefore, the voters of Milwaukee want to give the trusts the first real, hard knock they ever had in this country let the voters make the city of Milwaukee Social-Democratic. And besides we will thus give Milwaukee the best administration it ever had—the best administration any city in America has ever had.

The Source of Corruption

For this capitalist system not only results in untold misery and suffering, but also in crime, prostitution and corruption.

It is [to] the corruptive power of capitalism playing upon the venality, the uncertainty of the future, and the business instinct of those who have made politics a business, that we owe the corruption of our government. Graft is business in politics.

And one party lends itself as naturally and readily to the interests of the capitalist class as the other. And both naturally become corrupt, no matter what change may take place in the personnel of the office holders. The rule of Rose and the Democratic party in Milwaukee has made it one of the most venal cities in the nation—while the Republican "boy mayor" has made us ridiculous.

An Old Fallacy

No intelligent man, therefore, any longer believes in the panacea of electing so-called "good men" to office.

Plenty of "good men" have been corrupted by the bad system which they have tried to patch up and regulate.

The Root of the Evil

The Social-Democratic party goes to the root of the evil. Socialism will some day entirely remove the causes, and they will only disappear to the extent that we introduce Socialism.

The Social-Democrats, having this goal in view, possess the social conscience. Of many Social-Democrats elected in Germany, France, England and Austria, we know of none who have fallen by the wayside.

We can also proudly point to the record of the Social-Democrats in this city. Their personal integrity is not denied even by our enemies.

The mere presence of a few Social-Democrats in the common council and in the county board has proven to be a stimulus to honesty and progress.

Failure of Regulation

The utter inefficiency of the old parties is nowhere more apparent than with reference to the problem of public utilities. It is just now shown by the miserable failure of their so-called "regulation."

For thirty years a federal interstate commerce commission has failed to relieve one single burden of the people. And more recently we have witnessed the pitiful failure of our own state railroad commission. Its investigation of the Milwaukee street car service cost the city thousands of dollars and has not secured a single improvement or lessened the burden of our people one iota. The service today is just as vicious, the cars just as filthy and over-crowded, the rates just as exorbitant and the general operation just as reckless as ever.

The people never will find relief from the tyranny of private monopoly in these public utilities until they themselves own and operate them. And until the city is in a position to take over the public service utilities we demand their utmost extension and the enforcement of good service. City inspection to that end shall be established if we carry the city. We will also enforce the abolition of grade crossings and the elevation or depression of street tracks within the city limits.

OUR PROGRAM

In the light of the above facts, we make in this campaign the following demands:

Demand Home Rule

1. WE DEMAND that a new charter be formulated and that the city shall be empowered to control its own affairs and meet the needs of its own life. We ask for complete home rule in municipal matters, and for the initiative, the referendum and the right of recall with proper restrictions.

Ownership by the People

2. The City shall secure the ownership and management of all public service enterprises now and as fast as the state laws will allow. We demand that the city be given the power to take over and manage such public industries as are now in private hands, by getting permission to raise the bond limit and by issuing bonds secured on the properties which they will shortly more than pay for themselves. We also want the city to inaugurate such enterprises as the citizens by a majority referendum vote may approve.

* * *

Furthermore, as far as the present laws will permit, we pledge ourselves to the following:

Municipal Terminal

3. THE CITY shall establish and maintain ownership of land on Jones Island for the purpose of constructing and maintaining municipal docks, wharves, and for municipal railway terminal, trackage and belt line.

Tax Dodgers

4. The COMMON COUNCIL shall take steps necessary to make the big corporations pay their rightful share of municipal taxes, so that the money necessary to carry out the proposed measures can be raised. We demand the fair and equitable taxation of all property within the city limits and also that buildings owned by banks and trust companies shall be taxed like the property of other citizens. The attempt of some capitalist politicians to make an issue of the question of taxation is simply hypocritical pretense. There are millions of dollars worth of property in the city that escape taxation year after year and nothing has been done about it by the parties in power. A reasonable and scientific system of municipal finance will also increase the income from other sources.

Public Slaughter Houses

5. THE CITY shall erect, maintain and manage a public slaughter house. Furthermore at least four public markets in the various parts of the city, and four municipal abattoirs—houses—to enlarge the function of the municipality and to lower trust prices as far as they can be done locally.

6. The city shall establish and maintain a public works department which shall direct and perform the necessary work of the city—its building, plumbing, grading, paving, etc.—on an eight-hour workday and at a fair union wage. It shall abolish the contract system as far as possible in all public works and encourage the organization of labor in every respect.

Municipal Stone Quarry

7. THE CITY shall provide for its unemployed citizens. Besides the improvement of the streets, the city should push every possible municipal enterprise and afford work for as many of the unemployed as possible. The city shall operate a municipal quarry to supply crushed stone for our streets; establish a municipal wood and coal yard—also a municipal ice plant; and shall sell wood, coal and ice to citizens at cost price.

Better Homes and Living

8. THE CITY shall annex and incorporate reasonable territory in addition to its present area—Milwaukee having now the smallest area in the country for any city of the same class—the same to be surveyed and plotted by experts in such manner as to insure healthy and aesthetic conditions—for homes, factories, schools, and playgrounds.

Equality for Voters

THE CITY also shall redistrict the wards immediately on an equitable basis, so as to give one voter in certain downtown wards five times as much voting power as a voter in the outlying districts.

Municipal Hospital Service

9. FREE MEDICAL service shall be extended and free dispensaries established, which shall be kept open also on Sundays. The city should provide at least four municipal hospitals free from every taint of charity, including a maternity and tuberculosis hospital. Also a public crematory, which shall be free to those applying.

For Personal Liberty and Against Vice

10. THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRATIC party does not intend to curtail the few amusements and places of recreation that capitalism has left the working class. The saloon is still the proletarian's club house. But we demand that our city shall protect her youth and suppress vice. At the same time we call attention to the fact that prostitution is a part of the capitalist system and will entirely disappear only with capitalism.

Municipal Plumbing

11. THE CITY shall provide a system of street closets and comfort stations such as are found in modern European cities. Plumbing and sewerage to be done in all dwellings by the city at cost, the same to be paid for in yearly installments.

Garbage a Source of Profit

12. THE CITY shall cease to throw sewerage into the lake, thereby creating epidemics of typhoid fever and many other diseases. Instead, the city shall utilize its garbage and sewage matter in a modern scientific manner and make it the source of fertility and wealth. Expert service shall be employed for that purpose as is done in German and French cities.

Care for the Trees

13. THE CITY shall develop as rapidly as possible a system of small parks in the crowded centers similar to those now being developed in Chicago and other cities. These parks to have public playgrounds, open air gymnasiums, natatoriums, etc. The city shall plant and take care of the trees lining the streets and employ expert service for that purpose. The city, moreover shall condemn all slum habitations, replacing them with model buildings, to be rented to the people slightly above cost. The city shall also establish and operate a municipal lodging house to mitigate the tramp evil.

Schools the Bulwarks of Liberty

14. WE CONSIDER the free public schools a bulwark of political liberty and good citizenship in America and we resist any and all attempts to cripple them or lower their standard. We therefore demand that the school funds and the school bonds shall not be used for any other than school purposes under any condition.

Free text books and adequate facilities shall be provided in the public schools. At least one warm meal per day shall be furnished for the children, free of cost, whenever necessary, the same to be paid for by the city. Principals shall be required to devote a part of their time to instruction.

The large hall in each school building shall be available to residents of the district for all meetings of every nature. All new school buildings shall include facilities for social centers.

Auditorium for the People

15. THE CITY shall cause the Auditorium to be opened for meetings and amusements of the working people at low rates. Also, the city shall further extend the free concerts in its parks during summer, and arrange for at least one free concert a week in the Auditorium during winter.

Fair Wages and Election Holidays

16. FIREMEN AND POLICEMEN and all other city employees shall be always accorded fair treatment and a public trial before they can be discharged. The city shall pay a day wage—not less than a union wage—to its employees. And the city shall declare a public holiday on all election days which shall be compulsory, and a penalty shall be exacted from all employers of wage labor who shall ignore the order.

* * *

These are our demands in this election.

It is not claimed that by winning an isolated victory in a city like Milwaukee we can secure the collective ownership of production and distribution, i. e., Socialism. But such a victory would be a step forward, a milestone on the way of human progress.

THE SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY COMBATS not alone the conditions which exploit and oppress the wage-working class, but every kind of exploitation and oppression, whether directed against a class, a party, a sex, or a race. All its measures benefit not only the wage-working class, but the whole people, and while the working people are the banner bearers in this fight, in the last analysis everybody—the merchant, the professional man and the small employer—will profit thereby. Therefore, we invite every honest and well meaning voter, without regard to occupation, race or creed, to join in our undertaking for the emancipation of mankind.

C. ELECTION RETURNS

I. MUNICIPAL ELECTION RETURNS FOR THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE, 1898 TO 1910*

Votes for the Socialist Ticket (Mayor)

1898.....	2,430	1906.....	16,837
1900.....	2,585	1908.....	20,887
1902.....	8,453	1910.....	27,608
1904.....	15,343		

II. GENERAL ELECTION RETURNS IN MILWAUKEE COUNTY FOR GOVERNOR, 1898 TO 1910

Year	Socialist	Republican	Democratic	Populist
1898.....	1,613	20,063	19,471	2,643
1900.....	4,673	34,598	25,901	1,136
1902.....	10,881	26,790	22,403	1,127
1904.....	17,394	28,185	23,143	1,132
1906.....	17,031	24,521	12,856	1,123
1908.....	18,423	26,243	26,917	1,133
1910.....	23,264	20,201	16,896	1,123

*In the absence of election commission records, these figures have been compiled from press reports of the elections.

†Taken from the Permanent Election Records of the County Board of Canvassers.

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